

SCABIES FACT SHEET

What is it?

Scabies (pronounced skay-bees) is a skin disease caused by a tiny itch mite (sarcoptes scabiei). The mite burrows into the top layer of skin and lays eggs. Usually 4-6 weeks later the presence of these mites causes an allergic response and an itchy rash develops. The itch may begin much sooner (1-4 days) if you've had scabies before.

How do you get scabies?

Scabies is a highly contagious condition. It usually spreads by close personal contact with another person who is infested. Because it can spread rapidly among family members, roommates or sexual partners, these individuals should also seek treatment at the same time. Sharing clothing or towels is another means of spreading scabies.

Symptoms

- A rash is present which is associated with intense itching, often worse at night. The rash may affect the whole body, but in adults is almost never found above the neck or on the palms and soles.
- There may be linear burrows between the fingers, on the elbows, hands, wrists that look like a grayish-white thread on the surface of the skin.

Treatment

- At bedtime, apply prescribed cream, usually Permethrin 5%, to the entire skin surface below the neck, including buttock folds, genitals, and toe webs, following package directions.
- Leave on 8-12 hours.
- The morning after treatment, clean the bed linen, night clothes and clothing worn the previous day.
- If symptoms are still present 1 week later, you may repeat the treatment
- Even after effective treatment, the itching may last as long as two to three weeks.
- If you suspect that you still have scabies, or that it has returned following treatment, return to your clinician for examination. Most failures are related to incorrect use of medication or incomplete treatment of housing unit.

Environment

- Clothing/towels/bed linen should be either dry cleaned or machine washed in hot water and dried with high heat.
- Non-cleanable items, such as pillows, hats, etc, may be sealed in a plastic bag for 3 to 4 days.
- Vacuum furniture and carpeting and discard the vacuum bag immediately by sealing in a plastic bag.
- Do not share pillows or other personal items which will spread the infection.