

Fact Sheet

Scabies

What is scabies?

Scabies is a common skin condition caused by tiny insects called mites. Scabies can be unpleasant. Having scabies doesn't mean someone is not clean.

What are the symptoms?

The mites that cause scabies dig deep into the skin. This leads to a rash that is very itchy and red. Itchiness is usually worse at night. The rash usually appears between the fingers, in the groin area, between toes or around the wrists or elbows, but it may be found anywhere on the body.

In the elderly and children under 2 years of age, the rash can appear on the head, face, neck, chest, abdomen, and back as white, curvy, thread-like lines, tiny red bumps or scratch marks. Scratching can lead to infection of the skin.

How does it spread?

Scabies spreads from person to person by touch or contact with the clothes or other personal items of someone who has it. Short contact, like shaking hands or a hug, will not usually spread scabies. The mites can live off skin for up to 3 days. Animals do not spread scabies. Mites that are on clothing die when you wash them in hot water and dry them in a hot dryer.

How is it treated?

- Scabies will not go away without treatment
- Scabies is treated with a cream or lotion that is prescribed by your doctor or nurse. You may need to do 2 treatments, 1 week apart. It is important to read the label carefully and follow directions exactly.
- You may still be itchy for a few weeks. It doesn't mean that the mites are still there.
- To prevent scabies from coming back, everyone who lives in your home will need to be treated at the same time and new clothes and bedding should be used after the treatment.

How can the spread of scabies be prevented?

- Call your health care provider if you think you or your child have scabies.
- Wash bedding, towels and clothes in hot water and dry in a dryer at the hottest setting.
- Vacuum your home to prevent further spread.
- Store things that can't be washed in an airtight plastic bag for 1 week to kill the mites.
- Your child can return to child care or school once you have applied the first treatment.