

Scabies guidance

What is it?

Scabies is an infestation of the skin with the microscopic mite *Sarcoptes scabiei*. Infestation is common, found worldwide, and affects people of all races and social classes.

Signs and symptoms of scabies infestation

- Pimple-like irritations, burrows or rash of the skin, especially the webbing between the fingers; the skin folds on the wrist, elbow, or knee; the penis, the breast, or shoulder blades.
- Intense itching, especially at night and over most of the body.
- Sores on the body caused by scratching. These sores can sometimes become infected with bacteria.

Scabies transmission

By direct prolonged, skin-to-skin contact with a person already infested with scabies. Contact must be prolonged (a quick handshake or hug will usually not spread infestation). Infestation is easily spread to sexual partners and household members. Infestation may also occur by sharing clothing, towels, and bedding. Normal social contact would not spread scabies. It is unlikely that contact between work colleagues would spread scabies.

Timescale of infection

For a person who has never been infested with scabies, symptoms may take 4-6 weeks to begin. For a person who has had scabies, symptoms appear within several days. You do not become immune to an infestation.

Diagnosis

Diagnosis is most commonly made by looking at the burrows or rash. A skin scraping may be taken to look for mites, eggs, or mite faecal matter to confirm the diagnosis. If a skin scraping or biopsy is taken and returns negative, it is possible to still be infested. Typically, there are fewer than 10 mites on the entire body of an infested person; this makes it easy for an infestation to be missed.

Treatment

Several lotions are available to treat scabies. The lotion is applied to a clean body from the neck down to the toes and left overnight (8 hours). After 8 hours the lotion is washed off. All clothes, bedding, and towels used by the infested person 2 days before treatment should be washed in hot water and dried in a hot dryer. A second treatment of the body with the same lotion may be necessary 7-10 days later.

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Medical guidance notes and information

Once a person has completed the first treatment they are no longer infectious and may therefore return to work.

Anyone who is diagnosed with scabies needs treatment, as well as his or her sexual partners and persons who have close, prolonged contact to the infested person.

Everyone should receive treatment at the same time to prevent reinfestation.

Itching may continue for 2-3 weeks. This does not mean that the individual is still infested. No new burrows or rashes should appear 24-48 hours after effective treatment.

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