



Indiana State Department of Health

Epidemiology Resource Center

Quick Facts

About...Scabies

What are scabies?

Scabies is a skin infection caused by mites that burrow under the skin. You can only see it with a microscope. The mites lay eggs under the skin. An allergic reaction to the mites can cause intense itching. A person with scabies can spread it before they start to itch. Crusted (Norwegian) scabies is a severe form of the disease that is very contagious. It affects elderly people, and sometimes those with a weak immune system or people who cannot feel itching.

How is scabies spread?

Scabies is spread by skin-to-skin contact (including sex). It may also be spread by bedding, towels or clothes. It may take from 2 to 6 weeks for signs to appear after you get scabies. You can spread the mites during this time. Pets do not spread scabies from person-to-person. The type of mites that pets get can also infest humans but do not last long.

Who is at risk for scabies?

Scabies is more common in places where frequent skin-to-skin contact occurs like nursing homes, child-care settings, prisons, and jails.

How do I know if I have scabies?

The most common sign of scabies is itching (more at night), and burrows or thin wavy tunnels in the skin. Often blister-like sores will appear in the burrows of the skin, these may become infected. These sores often occur in the webs between the fingers, the heels of the palms, the wrists, armpits, buttocks, genitals, and elbows. Nipples may also be affected in older women.

A doctor can examine you for scabies.

How is scabies treated?

A doctor can prescribe a special lotion that will treat scabies. Most treatments are pesticides and can be toxic if used wrong or too often. Follow the instructions on the medicine and from your doctor. Most of these medicines are put on the body from the neck down and should be left on the skin for 8 hours. After the treatment, you should shower or bathe to wash off the lotion and then put on clean clothes.

Household and close contacts, or people who have had direct skin-to-skin contact with a case during the 2-6 weeks before the rash, should also be treated with the medicine at the same as the person with the rash to prevent scabies from returning.

A second treatment may be needed 7-10 days later if new burrows or rashes appear after effective treatment. Itching may continue for 2-3 weeks, but that does not mean someone is still infested. Your doctor may prescribe more medicine to help relieve itching.

On the day of treatment, you should also:

- Wash all linens, clothes and hats used or worn by the person with scabies. Use hot water and dry heat for at least 20 minutes.
- Dry cleaning can be used on items that cannot be washed.
- Items that cannot be washed or dry-cleaned should be sealed in a plastic bag for 1 week.
- Vacuum rugs, furniture and mattresses.

All information presented is intended for public use. For more information, please refer to: <http://www.cdc.gov/parasites/scabies/> or <http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/scabies/DS00451>.

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