



SCABIES

What is scabies?

Scabies, pronounced SKAY-bees, is an infestation of the skin with the microscopic mite *Sarcoptes scabiei* and is often referred to as an “itch mite”. Infestation is common, found worldwide, and affects people of all races and social classes. Scabies can spread rapidly under crowded conditions where there is frequent skin-to-skin contact between people, such as in hospitals, institutions, correctional or childcare facilities, and nursing homes. Scabies mites are very sensitive to their environment. They can only live off of a host body for 24-36 hours under most conditions.

What are the signs and symptoms?

The rash-like areas caused by the burrowing of these parasites often resemble other causes of rashes. It is important that a physician accurately diagnoses the problem and prescribes appropriate treatment. Diagnosis of scabies can be difficult. It may be clinically identified by examining skin scrapings under a microscope.

Classic signs or symptoms of scabies:

- Pimple-like irritations which often appear in thread-like pattern. Frequently located on warm, dark and moist areas of the body such as – around the waist or navel, the webbing between the fingers or toes; the skin folds on the wrist, elbow, or knee; the genital areas, on the buttocks, under the breasts, or in the armpits.
- Intense itching, especially at night and over most of the body.
- Sores on the body caused from intense scratching. These areas may lead to a bacterial infection.

For a person who has never been infested with scabies, symptoms may take 2-6 weeks to begin. Incubation (the time from exposure to onset of symptoms) can be much shorter for an individual who has been previously infested. Symptoms may develop within 1-4 days.

How is scabies spread?

Scabies are transmitted or spread by direct skin-to-skin contact with a person already infested with scabies. Contact must be prolonged or over a lengthy period of time. A quick handshake or hug will usually not spread infestation. It can be very easily passed to sexual partners and household members. Transmission of scabies may also occur by sharing clothing, towels, and bedding.

Other species of scabies or animal mites can live on humans. Pets, such as dogs and cats can be infected with mange. Close contact with an animal infested with mange may result in the typical skin irritation caused by the mites burrowing under the skin. However, the mites die in a couple of days and do not reproduce. This means that you may itch for several days, but *you* do not need to be treated with special medication. The symptoms of the mites (itching and rash) may continue until the pet is successfully treated.

What is the treatment? How can spread be prevented?

There are no vaccines against scabies. However, there are several topical products, generally lotions, available for treatment. Oral medication is also currently available. It is essential that the physician's instructions or the directions of the package insert are followed for successful treatment. It is generally recommended that all household and sexual contacts should receive preventative treatment at the same time as the infested person. One person in a family with scabies is uncommon. Close supervision of topical treatment, including bathing, is suggested for children and teenagers.

Outbreaks of scabies in healthcare and other community settings are not uncommon and require strict measures to prevent transmission and treat contacts. Caregivers who have had prolonged skin-to-skin contact with affected persons may benefit from protective treatment.

Guidelines for treatment and prevention of scabies:

- It is important to follow product instructions! Generally, apply prescribed lotion/cream to a clean body from the neck down to the toes. Do not apply to face. Leave on overnight or at least 8 hours. After 8 hours, take a bath or shower to wash away the lotion/cream.
- Following appropriate treatment put on clean clothes.
- All clothes, bedding, and towels that have been used by an infested person 3 days prior to treatment should be thoroughly washed. Use cycles of hot water for washing and very hot cycles for drying.
- The mites do not survive without skin contact more than 3 or 4 days. If specific articles of clothing, such as overcoats or heavy blankets, or certain objects as stuffed animals or throw pillows that can not be safely laundered- place them in a tightly closed plastic trash bag for several days to a week to prevent reinfestation.
- A second treatment of the body with the same lotion/cream is generally recommended 7-10 days later to destroy any eggs that may have survived the first treatment.
- Pregnant women and children are often treated with milder scabies medications.
- Infested children or adults should be excluded from school, childcare settings or work until the day after appropriate treatment.

NOTE:

After appropriate treatment, itching may continue for 2-3 weeks. This does not mean that you are still infested. A health care provider may prescribe additional medication to relieve itching if it is severe. No new burrows or rashes should appear 24-48 hours after effective treatment.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

SCPH Communicable Disease Unit 330-375-2662
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention www.cdc.gov
Mayo Clinic www.mayoclinic.com
Minnesota Department of Health www.health.state.mn.us