

Infestations



Scabies

Important Points

- Scabies is not due to poor personal cleanliness
- Scabies is transmitted by close contact with someone affected
- All family members in close contact with the person with scabies should be treated at the same time
- The treatment should be applied all over the body except the scalp and face and washed off the following day. If hands are washed during that time, the treatment should be applied again to the hands
- The rash or itch may take 2-3 weeks to settle after adequate treatment of the scabies mite
- Children can go to school after the first treatment

What is it?

Scabies is an itchy skin condition caused by a tiny mite which lives and breeds in the top layer of human skin. This mite lives only on humans. Some animals can be infested with mites, but these animal mites rarely affect humans.

Scabies causes a widespread itch and spotty rash (red on white skin, purple or brown on more pigmented skin) on the body and limbs. It does not usually occur on the head and neck. The itch is worse at night and with heat. The mite burrows in the skin, particularly around the fingers, but also on the hands and feet in young children. It may cause small blisters in these areas. Mites can also be found at the elbows, around the armpits, on the penis and scrotum and around the nipple area. People affected become allergic to the mite in the skin. They then develop widespread itch and an allergic rash.

How is it transmitted?

Scabies is commonly passed to others through close contact with an infected person, e.g., holding hands with them. It is often passed from one family member to another. Children playing together commonly pass it to one another. Scabies is not due to poor personal cleanliness. The scabies mite does not survive away from the human body and therefore it cannot be caught from the carpet or from furniture.

How is it prevented?

All family members and close contacts of a person with scabies should be treated, whether or not they appear to have scabies. Treating both the person

affected and also the other contacts is the most important factor in preventing spread of this condition.

How is it treated?

Most people can be treated with a cream or lotion applied to the skin which kills the live mites. A doctor should be consulted to decide the most suitable treatment. The cream or lotion is applied from the jaw line down to the toes, paying close attention to the hands and folds of the skin around the genitals. It should be left on for up to 24 hours and then washed off the following day. If the hands are washed during this time, the cream or lotion must be applied again to the hands.

All household members in close contact should be treated at the same time. All bedding slept in the night of the treatment and clothing worn in the last few days should be washed. A normal hot wash with detergent will be sufficient to kill the mite. Occasionally a second treatment may be recommended.

Once the treatment has been used, the itchy rash may take 2-3 weeks to settle. The doctor may prescribe cortisone creams to control the itch and any dermatitis that might occur as a result of the scabies. Children can go to school after the first treatment.

Further Information

Your Maternal and Child Health nurse.

Your pharmacist.

Your family doctor.

A dermatologist.

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