

SCABIES FACT SHEET

What is scabies?

Scabies is an infestation of the skin caused by the human itch mite. Mites are insect-like organisms that can only be seen with a microscope. They burrow under the skin where they live and lay their eggs. On a person, scabies mites can live for as long as 1–2 months. Off a person, scabies mites usually do not survive more than 48–72 hours.

Who can get scabies?

Anyone. Scabies is found worldwide and infects people of all races and social classes. Scabies can spread rapidly under crowded conditions where close body and skin contact is frequent. Child care facilities, nursing homes, extended-care facilities, and prisons are common sites where scabies infestations and outbreaks occur.

What are the symptoms of scabies?

The most common signs and symptoms are intense itching, especially at night, and a pimple-like itchy rash. The itching and rash may affect most of the body or be limited to common sites such as the wrist, elbow, armpit, webbing between the fingers, nipple, waist, belt-line and buttocks. The rash can include tiny blisters and scales. Scratching the rash can cause skin sores, which can become infected by bacteria. Tiny burrows are sometimes seen on the skin caused by mites tunneling just beneath the skin surface.

How soon do symptoms of scabies appear?

Symptoms may take as long as 4–6 weeks to appear in people who have never been exposed to scabies. People who have had scabies before usually experience symptoms 1–4 days after exposure.

How is scabies spread?

Scabies is usually spread by direct, prolonged, skin-to-skin contact with an infested person or indirect contact by sharing items such as clothing, towels or bedding used by an infested person. Scabies is easily spread to sexual partners and household members. A person infested with scabies can spread the infestation to others through skin-to-skin contact as long as the person remains untreated.

How is scabies diagnosed?

Scabies is diagnosed based on the characteristic appearance and distribution of the rash and presence of burrows. The diagnosis can be confirmed by identifying the mite, mite eggs or mite fecal matter under a microscope. A person can still be infested even if mites, eggs, or fecal matter cannot be found.

How is scabies treated?

Lotions or creams used to treat scabies (scabicides) are available only with a doctor's prescription. Carefully follow the provider's instructions or those printed on the product label. Sexual and close personal contacts who have had direct prolonged skin-to-skin contact with an infested person within the preceding month should be examined and treated. All persons should be treated at the same time to prevent reinfestation. Retreatment may be necessary if itching continues more than 2–4 weeks.

How can people protect themselves against scabies?

Scabies is prevented by avoiding direct skin-to-skin contact with an infested person or with items such as clothing or bedding used by an infested person. Bedding and clothing worn or used next to the skin anytime during the 3 days before treatment should be machine washed and dried using the hot water and hot dryer cycles or be dry-cleaned. Items that cannot be dry-cleaned or laundered can be disinfested by storing in a closed plastic bag for at least 3 weeks.

Should a person with scabies stay at home from school/daycare?

A child infested with scabies should stay at home and may return the day after treatment has started. A doctor's note stating that they are under treatment should be submitted upon their return.

Where can I get more information?

Information about scabies and other related health topics can be found at www.cdc.gov. The DC Department of Health promotes the health and safety of the District residents. For additional information, please visit www.doh.dc.gov or call (202) 442-9371.