

Scabies: Questions and Answers

What is scabies?

Scabies is a common skin condition caused by tiny mites. Scabies is sometimes called “the itch.” Scabies can be unpleasant but does not cause disease. Anyone can get scabies.

How is it spread?

Scabies is usually spread by close skin to skin contact with someone who has scabies. Scabies is sometimes spread indirectly by sharing clothing, towels or a bed. A quick handshake or hug usually will not spread scabies.

What are the signs of scabies?

Signs of scabies can begin 2-6 weeks after contact, if this is the first time you have had scabies. If you have had scabies before, signs appear 1-3 days after contact.

Scabies usually causes a pimple-like rash and severe itching which is worse at night. You may see tiny greyish white lines on the surface of the skin. These signs are often found between the fingers, on the wrists, elbows, waist, armpits, nipples, penis, belt line and buttocks.

In infants and very young children these signs can often be found on the head, face, neck, palms and soles of the feet.

How do I know for sure it is scabies?

Only your doctor or nurse practitioner can say for sure if you or your child has scabies. Itching and skin rashes can have many other causes.

How can scabies be prevented?

Scabies is prevented by avoiding direct skin-to-skin contact with someone who has scabies and by not sharing clothing, towels or a bed with someone who has scabies. If you know you have scabies, it may be helpful to inform those you have been in close contact with to watch for signs of scabies.

How is scabies treated?

- Once your doctor or nurse practitioner has confirmed that you have scabies, they will suggest a product to use. Follow the directions carefully.
- All household contacts, even those without symptoms, must be treated at the same time to prevent the spread of scabies.
- If you have scabs or crusts from scratching, have a bath or shower before using the product; this will soften the crusts and let the product work.
- Wait 15 minutes until the skin is dry and cool before applying the product.
- Cover your entire body with the product.
- Dress in clean clothes, and leave the product on for the recommended time (8-14 hours).
- Then take another bath or shower, wash well, and put on a fresh set of clean clothes.
- Your doctor or nurse practitioner will advise if a second treatment is necessary after 7 days.
- Itching can last for 2-4 weeks, even after the scabies mite is gone. Your doctor or nurse practitioner can suggest something to help with the itching.
- Affected people may return to work or school 24 hours after the start of treatment.

What do I do around my house?

Scabies mites do not live for more than 1-2 days off human skin. Wash bedding, clothes, and towels in hot water and use the dryer on the hot cycle. For items that cannot be washed, place in a sealed plastic bag for at least 5 days. There is no need to spray the home. Household sprays are not recommended and can be toxic if inhaled.

