



NL Health Services

Infection Prevention and Control

FACT SHEET

Scabies



What are scabies?

Scabies are a contagious infestation of the skin caused by a mite, *Sarcoptes Scabiei*, which burrows just under the skin where the female mite lays eggs. Mites can live on an individual for 1-2 months; however, not living on an individual they will only live for 48-72 hrs. Anyone can get scabies and it is not a sign of poor personal hygiene. It can affect any individual of any age, sex, race, or socio-economic level. Scabies are not spread by animals.

What are the symptoms of scabies?

- The mite is too small to be seen, but when it burrows under the skin it sometimes leaves a small thread-like line on the skin. The track marks may be found between the fingers, on elbows, hands, and wrists.
- An itchy rash can occur, which is most severe at night.
- In infants, the head, neck, palms, and soles of the feet can be affected.
- For an individual who has never had scabies, it can take 4-6 weeks from the time of contact until symptoms appear; however, individuals who have been re-exposed may show symptoms 1-4 days after re-exposure.

How is scabies diagnosed?

Scabies is diagnosed based on symptoms; however, it may be necessary to take a scraping from your skin to view under a microscope.

How is scabies spread?

- Prolonged direct skin-to-skin contact with an infected individual.
- Indirect spread from clothing or bedding can occur when these items have been in contact with an infected individual, but this is less common.
- Scabies can be spread from the time you are infected, even before the first symptoms appear, up until 24 hours **after** the first appropriate treatment.

How is scabies treated?

A health care provider will provide a prescription for treatment, as over-the-counter treatments have been found to be ineffective. Itching may persist for 2-4 weeks after treatment and should not be regarded as a treatment failure; however, overtreatment may have toxic effects.

How to prevent the spread of scabies

- All household and sexual contacts should receive treatment at the same time as the original case.
- Clothing and bedding should be washed in the hot cycle of the washer and dryer.
- Items not laundered can be placed in a tightly sealed bag for 7 days.
- Regular household cleaning is recommended with extra care given to cleaning mattresses, pillows, upholstered furniture, and car seats.