

Scabies Factsheet

Information for service users, relatives and visitors

What is scabies?

Scabies is a skin condition caused by mites (*Sarcoptes scabiei*) that burrow under the skin and lay eggs. The mites are very small and difficult to see with the naked eye. Symptoms appear on average 3-6 weeks following infection or 1-4 days in a person who has previously had scabies.

There are various forms of scabies. This Factsheet covers classical scabies which can occur in healthy people.

What does scabies cause?

Scabies causes an itchy widespread rash which can be found on fingers, wrists, forearms, around the waist, armpits, sides of the chest, lower part of the buttocks, inside of the legs and around the ankles. Although it may not appear in all these areas at once, it usually affects both sides of the body alike. The itching is often worse at night. The rash is caused by an allergic reaction to the mites which causes itching and does not correspond to where the mites are located.

How do you get scabies?

The scabies mites are not able to jump, but can crawl from an affected person to another person when there is prolonged skin-to-skin contact, e.g. holding hands, provision of personal care, sexual contact. Transmission through casual contact, such as a handshake, is unlikely.

Scabies mites may be able to live away from the body for up to 36 hours, therefore, transmission from clothes or bed linen may be possible.

How is scabies treated?

Treatment is usually in the form of a cream that is applied to the entire body, including under the nails, on the skin of the face, scalp, behind the ears and the soles of feet. If you miss out any area of the body the treatment may not work, so please follow the instructions/advice given carefully to ensure the treatment is effective. Please ask someone to help you apply the cream to ensure all areas of the body are covered. The treatment is repeated after a week. In some cases, an alternative treatment may be prescribed in tablet form. Your GP will decide which treatment is best for you.

How is scabies treated? (Continued)

You may continue to itch for several weeks following treatment. However, this is a result of an allergic reaction to the mites. It is not necessarily an indication that the treatment has not worked. If irritation or flare of eczema develops, seek advice from your GP.

Who should have treatment

You require treatment if you have been diagnosed with scabies as well as anyone who has had prolonged skin-to-skin contact with you (at least 10 minutes duration in the previous 8 weeks). They require treatment even if they do not have any symptoms and should seek advice from their GP. It is important that everyone commences treatment at the same time.

How is the spread of scabies prevented?

The following precautions are necessary until your treatment has been completed:

- Nurses and other healthcare staff will wear protective gloves and an apron for any skin-to-skin contact
- You should avoid prolonged skin-to-skin contact with any visitors, including those that have been identified as requiring treatment. Brief contact, such as kissing, hugging and shaking hands, is acceptable as there is not enough time for the mite to transfer to the other person
- Machine washing clothing and linen separately from other laundry at the hottest temperature they can withstand is recommended. If a duvet is used, it is adequate to wash the cover only. Clothing that is difficult to wash can be pressed with a hot iron. Items that cannot be washed or ironed should be placed in a sealed plastic bag for 4 days to allow the mites to die