

Information on Scabies Public Information

What is scabies?

Scabies is a fairly common infestation of the skin caused by a mite. Scabies mites burrow into the skin producing pimple-like irritations or burrows.

Who gets scabies?

Scabies infestations can affect people from all socioeconomic levels without regard to age, sex, race, or standards of personal hygiene. Clusters of cases, or outbreaks, are occasionally seen in nursing homes, institutions and child care centers. Outbreaks within secondary school or college settings rarely occur.

How is scabies spread?

Scabies mites are transferred by direct skin-to-skin contact. Indirect transfer from undergarments or bed clothes can occur only if these have been contaminated by infected people immediately beforehand. Scabies can also be transmitted during sexual contact.

What are the symptoms of scabies?

The most prominent symptom of scabies is intense itching, particularly at night. The areas of the skin most affected by scabies include the webs and sides of the fingers, around the wrists, elbows and armpits, waist, thighs, genitalia, nipples, breasts and lower buttocks.

How soon do symptoms appear?

Symptoms will appear from 2 to 6 weeks in people who have not been previously exposed to scabies infestations. People who have had a previous bout with scabies mites may show symptoms within 1 to 4 days after subsequent re-exposures.

When and how long is a person able to spread scabies?

A person is able to spread scabies until mites and eggs are destroyed by treatment.

What is the treatment for scabies?

Skin lotions are available through a physician's prescription for the treatment of scabies. The lotion is applied to the whole body except the head and neck. On the next day, a cleansing bath is taken and clean clothes should be put on. Clothes, bedding, and towels should be washed in hot water and dried in a hot dryer. Itch-

ing may persist for 1 to 2 weeks and should not be regarded as a treatment failure or re-infestation. Some cases require a second course of treatment.

What can be done to prevent the spread of scabies?

Avoid physical contact with infested individuals and their belongings, especially clothing and bedding. Health education of the life history of scabies and proper treatment of infested individuals and contacts are extremely important.

Should children be excluded from school/day care?

Children with scabies should be excluded until treatment has been completed. Anyone who has had prolonged, direct contact with the infected person may need treatment in the future. It may take 2 to 6 weeks for the rash to develop in persons who have not been previously exposed. If a person has had scabies previously, it will take only days for the rash to develop.