



Scabies

What is scabies?

Human scabies is caused by an infestation of the skin by the human itch mite (*Sarcoptes scabiei* var. *hominis*). The microscopic scabies mite burrows into the upper layer of the skin where it lives and lays its eggs.

How is it spread?

The scabies mite usually is spread by direct, prolonged, skin-to-skin contact with a person who has scabies.

What is the incubation period?

If a person has never had scabies before, symptoms may take as long as 4-6 weeks to begin. It is important to remember that an infested person can spread scabies during this time, even if he/she does not have symptoms.

In a person who has had scabies before, symptoms usually appear much sooner (1-4 days) after exposure.

What are the signs and symptoms?

The most common symptoms of scabies are intense itching and a pimple-like skin rash. The rash also can include tiny blisters (vesicles) and scales. Scratching the rash can cause skin sores; sometimes these sores become infected by bacteria.

Should a person with scabies be isolated?

Yes. Affected individuals should be kept from school/work/playgroup until the first treatment is completed.

What type of treatment and care should be given?

Yes. Products used to treat scabies are called *scabicides* because they kill scabies mites; some also kill eggs. Scabicides to treat human scabies are available only with a doctor's prescription; no "over-the-counter" (non-prescription) products have been tested and approved for humans.

In addition to the infested person, treatment also is recommended for household members and sexual contacts, particularly those who have had prolonged skin-to-skin contact with the infested person. All persons should be treated at the same time in order to prevent reinfestation.

How can I ensure that scabies is not passed to others?

Prolonged direct skin-to-skin contact with the affected person should be avoided until they have undergone the necessary treatment.

Scabies mites do not survive more than 2-3 days away from human skin. Items such as bedding, clothing, and towels used by a person with scabies can be decontaminated by machine-washing in hot water and drying using the hot cycle or by dry-cleaning. Items that cannot be washed or dry-cleaned can be decontaminated by removing from any body contact for at least 72 hours.

Fumigating rooms and using insecticidal sprays on furniture, infant carriers, child car seats and carpets are not recommended for cases of common scabies. Thorough cleaning and vacuuming of these items is sufficient.

Adapted from:

"Scabies". Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2010 (<http://www.cdc.gov/parasites/scabies/>. accessed 15 January 2015)