

Scabies

Definition:

Scabies is a parasitic infestation caused by a tiny, eight-legged mite (*Sarcoptes scabiei* var *hominis*).

The female mite burrows just under the skin and makes a tunnel where it lays eggs. The eggs hatch in three to four days, and the mite larvae travel to the skin's surface and develop into adult mites in one to two weeks. These mites can then spread to other areas of the skin or other people's skin. Itching is caused by the body's allergic reaction to the mites, eggs, and waste.

Symptoms:

Scabies symptoms include:

- Severe itch, often worse at night
- Itchy lines (linear burrows) and bumps (papules) on the fingers, wrists, arms, legs, and belt area
- Enflamed bumps on male genitalia and female breasts
- Larger rash in infants and small children, including on the palms, soles of the feet, ankles, and scalp.

If you previously had scabies, symptoms may start within a few days of exposure. If you've never had scabies, it can take four to six weeks for symptoms to start.

Transmission:

Scabies is transmitted person-to-person through close skin contact with an infected individual and through infested personal items (e.g., clothes and bed linens). You can still spread scabies even if you don't have any symptoms yet.

Prevention:

Treating scabies as soon as possible is the best way to prevent outbreaks. The mites that cause scabies usually die after two to three days away from human skin.

Prevent scabies from spreading with these steps:

- Avoid skin-to-skin contact with an infected person, especially if he or she has an itchy rash.
- If someone in the household has scabies, treat all household members to prevent the mites from spreading to others.
- Wash and dry bedding and clothing that has been in contact with the infested person, using hot water and drying in direct sunlight, a hot dryer cycle, or dry cleaning.
- Seal items that can't be washed in a plastic bag for at least 72 hours.
- Clean and vacuum or sweep rooms after an infested person has been treated, especially for people with crusted scabies.

Treatment:

Scabies treatment involves killing the mites and eggs by taking a pill or applying a topical medication. Your healthcare provider will likely instruct you to apply the medication to your entire body, from the neck down to your feet, including your toes. When treating infants and young children, it's important to apply the cream to their entire head and neck because scabies can also affect their face and scalp. Ensure the skin is clean and dry before applying the cream, leaving it on for at least eight to 14 hours before rinsing it off. Typically, it is applied at night and washed off in the morning. Following treatment, it's advisable to wear clean clothing. In some cases, a second application of the cream may be necessary, and additional treatments might be required if new symptoms emerge. Treatment for scabies often includes:

- **Permethrin cream.**
- **Benzyl benzoate emulsion.**
- **Sulfur ointment.**
- **Ivermectin (Stromectol).** Ivermectin can be taken as a pill to treat scabies when prescription creams don't work. It's often prescribed for people with crusted scabies or lowered immune systems. This is an antiparasitic pill given in a single dose, followed by a second dose one to two weeks later. Ivermectin isn't recommended for people who are pregnant or nursing or for children who weigh less than 15 kilograms.
- Oral antihistamine medicine (to help relieve itching).

Because the symptoms of scabies are due to a hypersensitivity reaction (allergy) to mites and their feces, itching may continue for several weeks after treatment, even if all the mites and eggs are killed. If itching is present more than two to four weeks after treatment or if new burrows or pimple-like rash lesions continue to appear, retreatment may be necessary.

Children and adults can return to school after the first treatment.