

Scabies

What is scabies?

Scabies (SKAY-bees) is an infestation of the skin by a microscopic mite, *Sarcoptes scabiei*. It is a common skin problem, found worldwide, and affects people of all races and social classes.

How do you get scabies?

Scabies is transmitted by direct, prolonged, skin-to-skin contact with a person already infested with the mite. Contact must be prolonged (a quick handshake or hug usually will not spread the mites). The mites are easily spread to sexual partners and household members. Scabies also spreads quickly in crowded conditions where there is frequent skin-to-skin contact between people, such as in childcare centers and nursing homes.

One also can become infested through shared clothing, towels, and bedding.

Once away from the human body, the mites do not survive more than 48-72 hours. When living on a person, however, an adult female mite can live up to a month.

What are the symptoms of scabies?

For a person who has never been infested with scabies, symptoms may take 4-6 weeks to begin. For a person who has had the disease before, symptoms appear within several days of exposure. There is no immunity to scabies.

Symptoms usually begin as intense itching, especially at night. Any part of the body can itch. Pimple-like irritations, burrows, or a rash are especially likely to appear on the webbing between the fingers; the skin folds on the wrist, elbow, or knee; the penis, the breast, or shoulder blades.

Scratching the itch often causes sores to develop and secondary bacterial infections can occur.

People with weakened immune systems and the elderly are at risk for developing a more severe form of scabies, called Norwegian or crusted scabies.

How is scabies diagnosed?

Diagnosis is commonly made by looking at the burrows or rash. A skin scraping may be taken to look for the mites, their eggs, or their poop. If a skin scraping or biopsy is taken and the test results are negative, it is still possible that you are infested. Typically there are fewer than 10 mites on the entire body of an infested person. This makes it easy for

an infestation to be missed.

Can scabies be treated?

Yes. Several lotions are available to treat scabies. Always follow the directions as provided by your physician or the directions on the package insert. Apply the lotion to a clean body from the neck down to the toes and leave it on overnight (at least 8 hours). After 8 hours, take a bath or shower to wash off the lotion. A second treatment of the body with the lotion may be necessary 7-10 days later. No new burrows or rashes, however, should appear 24-48 hours after effective treatment.

It is important to note that the itching sensation will not stop immediately following treatment. That is because your body still is reacting to the dead mites, their eggs, and their feces. It may take 2-3 weeks following treatment before the itching sensation will stop. Your physician can prescribe medication to relieve the itching if it is severe.

Put on clean clothes. All clothing, bedding, and towels used by the infested person during the 2 days before treatment should be washed in hot water and dried in a hot dryer. Items that cannot be laundered should be put in a sealed plastic bag for five (5) days.

Who should be treated for scabies?

Obviously, anyone who has been diagnosed with scabies needs to be treated. Also, the sexual partners, household contacts, and any other persons who have close, prolonged contact to the infested person also should be treated. When treating members of the household, everyone should be treated at the same time to prevent becoming infested again through one another.

I have heard that dogs can get scabies. Is this the same disease as in people?

No. Pets become infested with a different kind of scabies mite. If your pet is infested with scabies (also called mange), and they have close contact with you, the mite can get under your skin and cause itching and skin irritation. However, the mites die in a couple of days and do not reproduce. If you contract mange mites from your pet, you do not need treatment, but your pet does. Until your pet is successfully treated, mites can continue to be passed from the animal to you.