

## Scabies

### What is scabies?

Scabies is a disease of the skin caused by a mite. Scabies mites burrow into the skin, producing pimple-like irritations or burrows. This is called an 'infestation'.

### Who gets scabies?

Anyone can have a scabies infestation. Scabies can affect people of any age, gender, race or level of cleanliness. Even if a person has had a scabies infestation before, a person can be infested again if they are exposed to the mites. Outbreaks of scabies may occur in nursing homes, institutions, schools, and child care centers.

### How is scabies spread?

Scabies mites are spread from one person to another during direct skin-to-skin contact, including sexual contact. The mite does not jump from one person to another. However, indirect transfer of mites in undergarments, sheets, or blankets can occur if these articles have been contaminated by an infested person immediately before use by another person. A person is able to spread scabies until the mites and eggs are killed by treatment.

### What are the symptoms of scabies?

The most common symptom of scabies is intense itching, especially at night. The areas of the skin most often affected by scabies include the webs and sides of the fingers, around the wrists, elbows, armpits, waist, thighs, genitalia, breasts, and lower buttocks. People with scabies sometimes develop skin infections due to scratching – signs of skin infections include redness, warmth, pain/tenderness, swelling, and pus at the site of infection.

### How soon after exposure do symptoms appear?

The first time a person gets scabies, the symptoms may appear anywhere from two to six weeks after exposure. If a person has had scabies before, he or she is more sensitive and symptoms appear much more quickly, often within one to four days.

### How is scabies diagnosed?

A physician can diagnose scabies by looking at skin scrapings under a microscope. Applying ink to the skin also can help the doctor identify scabies burrows.

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### **What is the treatment for scabies?**

Skin lotions containing permethrin, lindane, or crotamiton are available by prescription for the treatment of scabies. Medications should be used exactly as described by your healthcare provider. Fingernails should be trimmed and cleaned underneath to remove any mites or eggs. Persons who have had skin contact with an infested person (including family members, roommates, and sexual contacts) should also be treated at the same time as the infested person. Sometimes, itching may persist for as long as two to three weeks after effective treatment. Antihistamine or steroid medicines may reduce the itching. Skin infections may require antibiotic therapy.

Washable belongings of persons infested with scabies, including bed linens and clothing worn within 48 hours of treatment, should be washed in hot water and dried in a hot dryer. Articles that cannot be washed may be dry cleaned, or bagged in plastic for seven days.

### **How can scabies be prevented?**

Avoid direct physical contact with infested people and their belongings, especially clothing and bedding, until 24 hours after treatment. To prevent further spread, persons with scabies should not attend school or day care, or be at the workplace, until the day after treatment

### **How can I get more information about scabies?**

- 1) If you have concerns about scabies, contact your healthcare provider.
- 2) Call your local health department. A directory of local health departments is located at <http://www.vdh.virginia.gov/LHD/index.htm>.
- 3) Visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website at <http://www.cdc.gov/parasites/scabies/>.