



# SCABIES

Scabies is a common skin infestation caused by microscopic parasites called a mite. The female mite burrows under the skin to lay her eggs, which subsequently hatch and start the infestation cycle again.

Symptoms of scabies do not appear until weeks after exposure. The skin reaction is probably due, in part, to a sensitization or “allergic” reaction to the mites. On re-exposure, symptoms can start within days. The infestation is in the form of an intensely itchy rash, which consists of red bumps and burrows (i.e., short, wavy, thread-like lines in the skin).

## **Who gets this disease?**

Anyone who has contact with the mite can become infested with scabies.

## **How is it spread?**

The mite is spread by direct skin-to-skin contact, or by skin contact with clothes, bedding, etc. that the mites have crawled onto. The mites can survive only three days off the body and cannot jump or fly. They require direct contact with skin to spread. The incubation period for this disease is two to six weeks after exposure.

## **How is it diagnosed and treated?**

It can be diagnosed by the typical appearance of the rash and accompanying symptoms and by examining skin scrapings under the microscope to see the mite or its’ eggs.

Scabies is treated with one of several prescription mite-killing creams or lotions, which are applied once to the skin and then washed off after a specified period of time. Medicine to relieve the itching is often necessary. (Note: Even after effective therapy, itching can persist for up to 2 to 4 weeks). Treatment is recommended for all

household members – even those without symptoms – due to the high likelihood of spread within a household. Prophylactic treatment is also recommended for people who have had direct skin-to-skin contact with an infected individual.

## **How can the spread of this disease be prevented?**

1. Follow previously outlined principles of hand washing and cleanliness at the childcare facility.
2. Children should not share personal items, cribs, mats or clothing.
3. Each child’s dirty clothing should be stored separately and sent home for laundering.
4. If a case of scabies occurs in the daycare facility:
  - a. Wash and dry on the hot cycle all washable items belonging to the center that came into contact with the child’s skin during the 72 hours prior to treatment.
  - b. Difficult to wash items (e.g., stuffed toys, pillows) can be stored in tightly closed plastic bags for four days and then used again. (Note: The mite cannot live off the body for more than three days).
  - c. Thoroughly vacuum any carpet or upholstered furniture.
5. Pesticide sprays are not recommended and can be harmful to people and animals.
6. If a rash, which appears suspicious for scabies, is noticed on a child in the childcare center, tell the parents the child should be seen by a healthcare provider.

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## **Who should be excluded?**

Infected individuals should be excluded until treatment is completed. If two or more cases occur in the daycare center, call the Division of Public Health Services, Communicable Disease Control Section for further recommendations.

## **Reportable?**

No, scabies is not reportable by New Hampshire law to the Division of Public Health Services, Communicable Disease Control Section. However, Public Health Professionals are available for a consultation at (603) 271-4496 or 800-852-3345 ext. 4496.