

Scabies

What is scabies?

Scabies is an infestation of the skin caused by the microscopic mite *Sarcoptes scabiei*.

Where is scabies found?

Scabies is common, occurs worldwide, and affects people of all races and social classes. It spreads rapidly from person to person in crowded conditions such as in hospitals, institutions, child-care facilities, and nursing homes.

What are the signs and symptoms of scabies infection?

The symptoms of scabies include:

- Pimple-like irritations or rash of the skin, especially the webbing between the fingers; the skin folds on the wrist, elbow, or knee; and the genitals, breast, or shoulder-blades.
- Intense itching, especially at night.
- Sores on the body caused by scratching. These sores can sometimes become infected with bacteria.

How does someone get scabies?

Scabies is contracted by direct, prolonged, skin-to-skin contact with a person already infested with scabies. Contact must be prolonged (a quick hug or handshake will usually not spread infestation). Scabies is easily spread to sexual partners and household members. Infestation may also occur by sharing clothing, towels, and bedding.

How long do the mites live?

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

Who is at risk for severe infestation?

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

Can pets spread scabies?

No. Pets become infected with a different kind of scabies mites. 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 mite dies in a couple of days and does not reproduce. These mites may cause you to itch for several days, but you do not need to be treated with special medication to kill them. Until your pet is successfully treated, however, mites can continue to burrow into your skin and cause you to have symptoms.

How soon do symptoms appear?

For a person who has never been infested with scabies, symptoms may take 4-6 weeks to begin. For a person who has previously had scabies, symptoms appear more quickly. You do not become immune to an infestation and a person can get scabies more than once.

How is scabies infestation diagnosed?

Diagnosis is most commonly made by looking at the rash. A skin scraping may be taken to look for mites, eggs, or mite fecal matter to confirm the diagnosis, but they can sometimes be negative even if a person is infested. Since there are typically 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 on the package insert. Apply lotion to a clean body from the neck down to the toes and leave on overnight (8 hours). After 8 hours, take a bath or shower to wash off the lotion. Put on clean clothes. All clothes, bedding, and towels used by the infested person 2 days before treatment should be washed in hot water and dried in a hot dryer. A second treatment of the body with the same lotion may be necessary 7-10 days later. Pregnant women and children are often treated with milder scabies medications.

Who should be treated for scabies?

Anyone who is diagnosed with scabies, as well as his or her sexual partners and persons who have close, prolonged contact to the infested person should also be treated. If your health care provider has instructed family members to be treated, everyone should receive treatment at the same time to prevent reinfestation.

How soon after treatment will the symptoms go away?

Itching may continue for 2-3 weeks, but does not mean you are still infested. Your health care provider may prescribe additional medication to relieve itching if it is severe. No new rash should appear 48 hours after effective treatment.

For specific concerns about scabies, call the New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services, Communicable Disease Control and Surveillance Section at 603-271-4496 or 800-852-3345 x4496. For further information, refer to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website at www.cdc.gov or the New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services website at www.dhhs.nh.gov.