

Scabies Causes and Treatment

Scabies is a highly contagious skin disease caused by a parasite

The parasite that causes scabies is a mite that burrows under the skin.

Scabies is spread through personal contact

Scabies is usually spread from person to person by close, prolonged physical contact such as touching a person who has scabies or holding hands. It can also be spread during sexual contact. Clothes, towels, or bed sheets can spread the scabies mite if the items were recently in contact with a person who has scabies. The mites will die within 48 hours if they are away from the human body. Scabies can spread quickly in crowded situations where there is frequent skin-to-skin contact (such as hospitals, nursing homes, and child care centers). People cannot catch scabies from animals.

The most common symptom is a rash that is very itchy, especially at night

The rash can be anywhere on your body but is most common on the hands, breasts, elbows, knees, wrists, armpits, genital area, and waistline. Often the rash looks like red bumps or tiny blisters, which form a line.

Symptoms begin 2 to 6 weeks after the first exposure to scabies, or 1 to 4 days after re-exposure. Scratching may cause skin to become infected with bacteria (germs).

See your doctor if you have symptoms of scabies

Your doctor can check to see if your rash is due to scabies. Scabies is diagnosed by using a microscope to look for the mite in skin scrapings.

Scabies is treatable

Creams or lotions that kill the mite (such as 5% permethrin, lindane, and crotamiton) can be applied to the skin. Follow your doctor's instructions for treatment. Itching may continue for up to 1 to 2 weeks after treatment; it does not mean that the treatment did not work or that you have scabies again. Sometimes, a second course of treatment is necessary. Clothing and bed linens worn or used in the 48 hours before treatment should be washed and dried on hot cycles or professionally dry cleaned. There is no need for treatment of rugs or fumigation of the house, other than vacuuming and general cleanliness.

Scabies can be prevented

- Infested persons should be excluded from school or child care until after starting treatment, usually the overnight.
- No one should share clothing, bedding, or other personal articles with an infested person.
- Clothing that cannot be laundered or dry cleaned should be stored for several days to avoid reinfestation.
- All household members and close contacts of a person with scabies should be treated at the same time as the person with scabies.