

Scabies

Description

Scabies affects people of all ages, sexes, races and standards of personal hygiene. Having scabies does not mean that people are unclean.

Scabies is an itchy rash caused by a little mite that burrows under the skin. Itchy red bumps or blisters appear between the fingers, on the wrist, elbow, or knee, private parts or shoulder blades. Thread-like 'tunnels' (about 1cm long) may be seen on the skin, but can be difficult to see due to scratches. The blisters are very itchy particularly at night when the body is warm.

Children younger than two years can be infected on the head, neck, palms and soles of the feet, but they can have mites all over their body.

Scabies is a human infection. Mites that infest animals (e.g. those that cause mange in dogs or horses) may look similar, but they do not burrow into human skin, lay eggs on humans or cause itching in humans.

How does it spread?

Scabies spread by skin-to-skin contact with a person who has scabies, by sharing clothing, towels and bedding. Contact must be long-lasting, a quick handshake or hug will usually not spread the disease.

Itching begins two to six weeks after getting scabies for people who have not had scabies before, and within one to four days in people who have had scabies before.

Infectious period

People with scabies can pass on the mites until the day after they have started treatment. The scabie mite can live for two to three days on the clothes, bed linen and other personal items of people who have scabies.

Exclusion period

- A child with scabies should not attend the centre until the day after they have started treatment.
- All sores/lesions/broken skin should be covered either with bandages or under clothes until healed.

Responsibilities of staff

- Tell parents that there is scabies in the centre.
- Display information about scabies on your notice board.
- Ask the parent to keep their child at home until the day after they have started treatment.
- Wash towels, flannels, blankets, bedding.
- Wash dress-up clothes daily. It may be easier to remove dress-up clothes rather than wash daily.
- Vacuum carpets and furnishings.
- Make sure there is a good air flow through the centre, particularly in sleep rooms to avoid overheating.
- Make sure staff and children wash their hands with soap and warm water and then thoroughly dry them.
- If more than one child has scabies and you cannot be confident that the situation is under control then these measures should be carried out daily.

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Responsibilities of parents

These measures may seem to be very strict but they are really important to get rid of the scabie mites and prevent spread to other children and family members:

- Keep your child at home until the day after they have started treatment.
- A special cream or lotion will be prescribed by your family doctor and it is important that the instructions for use are followed carefully. Treat all close contacts of the child (i.e. people who have skin-to-skin contact with the child) and other people in the household at the same time.
- Make sure all family members are washing and drying their hands properly.
- Wash sheets, pillow cases and clothing used during that week the morning following treatment.
- Rooms should be thoroughly cleaned with normal household products.
- Vacuum the carpet and furnishings regularly.

Treatment

It is important to consult your family doctor for a correct diagnosis of any unexplained skin lesion. Your GP may make a diagnosis based on the appearance of the lesion or may need to do further testing.

A special cream or lotion will be prescribed by the GP and it is important that the instructions for use are followed carefully.

The itch and the rash can take several weeks to clear completely.