

# Scabies

## What is scabies?

Scabies is a contagious skin condition caused by a small insect-like parasite called a mite that burrows under the skin. Scabies is widespread around the world. Getting scabies is not related to gender, race, socio-economic level or personal hygiene.

## What are the symptoms?

- The most common symptom is a very itchy rash which occurs especially at night. The rash can be anywhere on your body but is usually on the hands, wrists, chest, genital area and waistline.
- The rash often looks like crooked raised lines made up of tiny blisters or bumps on your skin.
- Symptoms usually begin four to six weeks after the first exposure to the mite but can start much sooner if you have had scabies before.

## How is it spread?

- Scabies is spread by prolonged skin-to-skin contact with a person who has scabies. A quick handshake or hug will usually not spread scabies.
- Clothes, towels, bed sheets, etc. may also spread the scabies mite if the items were recently in contact with a person who has scabies. The mite can live on clothing and other objects for two to three days.
- Scabies can spread through people in close physical contact like in a family, childcare group, school class or long-term care home.
- Scabies can be spread to other people even before symptoms appear.

## How is scabies diagnosed?

Scabies is diagnosed by using a microscope to look for the mite in skin scrapings. Sometimes a doctor who is familiar with scabies will diagnose scabies after looking at your rash and asking you about your symptoms.

Talk to your doctor:

- If you think you have signs and symptoms of scabies.
- If you believe you've had close contact with someone who has scabies.

## Can scabies be treated?

Yes. There is medicine available to kill the scabies mites.

- Usually creams or lotions that kill the mite are applied to the skin.
- Medicine taken by mouth are sometimes prescribed for people who have poor immune systems, or in outbreak situations.

It is important to follow the doctor's instructions for treatment.

Itching may continue for a week or two after treatment; it does not mean that the treatment did not work. If itching continues after two to four weeks or new itchy rashes are appearing your doctor may consider treating you again.

Because scabies can spread to others, the doctor may recommend treatment for all family members and other close contacts who have prolonged skin to skin contact with the person with scabies, even if they show no signs of infestation. It is important for all close contacts to be treated at the same time.

## When can a child with scabies go back to school or childcare?

Children diagnosed with scabies can return to school 24 hours after they have been treated.

## Prevention

To prevent re-infestation and to prevent the mites from spreading to other people:

- **Ensure all infested persons and close contacts are appropriately treated.**
- **Clean all clothes and linen.** Machine wash all clothing, towels and bedding you used for two days before treatment in hot water and dry using the hot cycle.
- **Starve the mites.** Things that can't be washed should be removed from body contact for at least three days since scabies cannot live without skin contact for more than a few days.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact the Infectious Disease Control Team at 519-663-5317 ext. 2330 or go to [www.healthunit.com](http://www.healthunit.com)

Additional Resources:

Middlesex-London Health Unit. *A Guide to Common Infections*. Available at <https://www.healthunit.com/guide-to-common-infections>

Reference:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Parasitic Disease Division. *Scabies Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)*. Retrieved on August 28, 2018 from [http://www.cdc.gov/parasites/scabies/gen\\_info/faqs.html](http://www.cdc.gov/parasites/scabies/gen_info/faqs.html)

Caring for Kids. *Scabies*. Retrieved on August 28, 2018 from <https://www.caringforkids.cps.ca/handouts/scabies>

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