
What is scabies?

Scabies is an infestation of the skin by a mite called *Sarcoptes scabiei*. The infestation leads to a rash over the affected area and intense itching. Severe infestations are called Norwegian scabies.

Who is at risk for scabies?

Anyone can get scabies. The elderly and those with compromised immune systems are more likely to develop Norwegian scabies.

What are the symptoms of scabies?

Symptoms of scabies include an itchy rash. Itching may become more severe at night. Certain areas of the body favored by the mites include the finger webs, wrists, elbows, armpits, belt line and genitals. In women, nipples, lower abdomen and lower buttocks may also be involved. In children younger than two years, the rash is more vesicular and occurs in areas such as the scalp, face, neck, palms, and soles.

How soon do symptoms appear?

For people who have never had scabies, it may take up to six weeks to develop symptoms. For people with previous scabies infestations, symptoms will develop one to four days after infestation.

How is scabies spread?

Scabies is spread by direct person-to-person contact with someone who has scabies. Scabies in adults is often acquired sexually. Transmission via bedding and clothing worn close to the skin is also possible. However, transmission from other inanimate objects (chairs, combs, countertops, etc.) is rare except with Norwegian scabies.

When and for how long is a person able to spread scabies?

Spread of the scabies can happen as long as a person remains infested with the mites and is not treated.

How is a person diagnosed?

People who think they have scabies should consult a health care professional. A skin scraping can be evaluated for the presence of the mite or eggs. Burrows in the skin may also be visible.

What is the treatment?

People with scabies are treated with anti-scabies lotions that are applied to the skin. In general, one

treatment is enough to prevent further spread. However, two treatments are sometimes needed. Treatment instructions should be followed carefully. All household members should be treated at the same time to prevent reinfestation.

Untreated, a person with scabies will continue to spread scabies to other people. The continued scratching of the skin can lead to secondary bacterial infections that may be difficult to treat and may lead to other complications.

Does past infection make a person immune?

No. Repeated infestations can occur. People who get repeated infestations will notice symptoms within a couple of days.

Should children or others be excluded from child care, school, work or other activities if they have scabies?

Children with scabies should be excluded from child care and school and can return after treatment has been completed. Health care workers should be treated and check with their infection control practitioner before returning to work. Those who have jobs requiring frequent direct contact with people can return to work after completing treatment.

What can be done to prevent the spread of scabies?

People who develop itching rashes should consult with their health care provider. Those who are diagnosed with scabies should be treated immediately. Close contacts of people with scabies should also be treated. Close contacts include people who live in the same house, child care contacts and others who have had direct skin-to-skin contact with someone who has scabies.

Bedding and clothing worn next to the skin during the three days before therapy is started should be laundered in a washer with hot water and dried on high heat. Mites do not survive in the environment for more than three days.

Additional Information

Additional information is available by calling the North Dakota Department of Health at 800.472.2180.

Outbreaks of this disease in institutions are reportable. As mandated by North Dakota law, any incidence of this disease in an institution setting shall be reported to the North Dakota Department of Health.

Resources:

1. American Academy of Pediatrics. [Children in Out-Of-Home Child Care]. In: Kimberlin DW, Brady MT, Jackson MA, Long SS, eds. *Red Book: 2018 Report of the Committee on Infectious Diseases*. 31st ed. Itasca, IL: American Academy of Pediatrics; 2018:[pages 133-143].
2. American Academy of Pediatrics. [Scabies]. In: Kimberlin DW, Brady MT, Jackson MA, Long SS, eds. *Red Book: 2018 Report of the Committee on Infectious Diseases*. 31st ed. Itasca, IL: American Academy of Pediatrics; 2018:[pages 718-721].
3. Heymann, D. L. (2015). *Control of Communicable Diseases Manual, 20th Edition*. Scabies. American Public Health Association. 2015: 550-552.