

What is scabies?

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

Who is at risk for scabies?

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

What are the symptoms of scabies?

Symptoms of scabies include a skin rash and itching, which may be more severe at night. Certain areas of the body favored by the mites include finger webs, wrists, elbows, armpits, waist, thighs, shoulder blades, and genitals. In women, the lower abdomen, nipples, and lower buttocks may also be involved. The head, face, neck, palms, and soles are often involved in infants and young children, but usually not adults and older children.

Symptoms of crusted scabies include vesicles (small, fluid-filled sacs on the skin) and thick crusts over the skin that can contain large numbers of mites.

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 exposure.

How is scabies spread?

Scabies is spread by direct person-to-person contact with someone who has scabies. Transmission usually occurs through prolonged close, personal contact. 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 (e.g., chairs, combs, countertops) is rare, except with crusted scabies.

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

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

Does past infection make a person immune?

No. Repeated infestations can occur. People who previously were infested are sensitized and develop symptoms one to four days after repeated exposure to the mite.

How is a person diagnosed?

People who think they have scabies should consult a healthcare professional. A skin scraping should be evaluated under a microscope for the presence of the mite, mite eggs, or mite feces. Burrows in the skin may also be visible.

What is the treatment?

People with scabies are usually treated with prescription lotions or creams 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. Oral medications may also be prescribed as treatment. No over-the-counter products have been tested and approved to treat scabies.

Untreated, a person with scabies can 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 can lead to other complications.

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/or school and can return after treatment has been completed. Healthcare 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 their healthcare 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 household, 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 treatment 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.

This disease is a reportable condition during outbreaks in institutions. As mandated by North Dakota law, any outbreaks of this disease in an institution shall be reported to the North Dakota Department of Health.

Resources:

1. *Red Book: 2015 Report of the Committee on Infectious Diseases*. 30th ed. [Children in Out-Of-Home Care]. Kimberlin, DW; Brady, MT; Jackson, MA; Long, SS. American Academy of Pediatrics. 2015: 132-151.
2. *Red Book: 2015 Report of the Committee on Infectious Diseases*. 30th ed. [Scabies]. Kimberlin, DW; Brady, MT; Jackson, MA; Long, SS. American Academy of Pediatrics. 2015: 702-704.
3. Heymann, D. L. (2015). *Control of Communicable Diseases Manual, 20th Edition*. Scabies. American Public Health Association. 2015: 550-552.