



SCABIES

What is SCABIES?

Scabies is a fairly common skin infestation caused by a mite. Scabies mites burrow into the skin, producing pimple-like irritations or burrows.

Who gets scabies?

Anyone can get scabies. Scabies affects all persons regardless of economic status, skin color, age or standard of personal hygiene.

How is scabies spread?

Scabies is usually spread by direct, prolonged, skin-to-skin contact with a person who has scabies. Scabies is easily spread to sexual partners and household members. Scabies is sometimes spread indirectly from shared clothing or bedding if they are contaminated immediately before items are shared.

What are the symptoms?

The most common symptoms are intense itching and scratching, especially at night, and a pimple-like rash. The areas of skin most affected include the wrists, elbows, armpits, webbing between the fingers, nipples, genitalia, waist, buttocks and breast. Sometimes secondary bacterial infections occur from the constant scratching that leads to bleeding and/or broken skin.

How soon do symptoms appear?

For persons getting scabies for the first time, itching and development of the rash can take up to eight weeks. The normal range is 2-6 weeks. For a person who gets re-infested with scabies, itching and onset of rash occurs within 1-4 days.

How long can a person spread scabies?

A person is able to spread scabies until mites and eggs are destroyed by treatment. Infested persons who are without symptoms can transfer the mite prior to their knowledge of having scabies. This is why scabies outbreaks occur within institutions like long term care facilities and childcare centers.

What is the treatment for scabies?

A health care provider can prescribe a medicated lotion or cream, called a "scabicide," to treat scabies. No over-the-counter products have been tested and approved for humans. Always follow the instructions provided by the doctor or pharmacist, as well as the package insert. Treatment is also recommended for household members and sexual contacts. All persons should be treated at the same time to prevent re-infestation. A second treatment is sometimes necessary.

What is crusted (Norwegian) scabies?

Norwegian scabies is a severe form of scabies that can occur in persons with weakened immune systems, the elderly, disabled or debilitated. Persons with this form of scabies have thick crusts of skin that contain large numbers of mites and eggs. They are very contagious by direct and indirect contact (described above). These persons should receive quick and aggressive treatment to prevent outbreaks.