

Classical Scabies

Information Sheet

What is it?

Scabies is an infectious skin condition that causes intense itching. It is caused by tiny mites which burrow into the skin laying eggs.

Scabies can be spread through close physical contact and less commonly through secondary contact with clothes and linen.

Outbreaks of scabies seem to follow a cycle with the number of cases reaching its peak every 20 years.

How does a person become infected?

Scabies is passed from person to person usually by prolonged (i.e. 10 minutes) skin to skin contact such as hand holding, sexual contact, etc. It is less commonly passed on through clothes and bed linen.

What are the signs and symptoms?

If you have never had scabies before the symptoms will begin 2-6 weeks after infection. If you have had Scabies before the symptoms will begin after 48 hours of infection. Scabies causes your skin to itch intensely - this is a clue to your body having an allergic reaction to the mites saliva and eggs.

The symptoms appear to be worse at night, after exercise and in a warm bath or shower.

You may notice lines on your hands/wrists which are the marks caused by the mite burrowing into your skin. There may also be red bumps like hives, tiny bites or pimples. The skin may be crusty or scaly.

Burrow marks are typically found:

- Between fingers
- Wrists
- Armpits
- Elbow
- Waist
- Buttocks
- Breasts (women)
- Genital areas (men)

How bad is it?

Scabies will not go away without treatment. The itch can continue after you have been treated but this does not mean that the treatment has not worked. The itch may take up to 4 weeks to stop as your body is still reacting to the dead mites.

Scratching can lead to serious skin conditions such as impetigo (school sores) and other skin infections. These complications require treatment with antibiotics and should be seen by a doctor. Keeping fingernails short and clean, good hand hygiene, and avoiding scratching can prevent skin infections developing.

How do I treat it?

Scabies can be difficult to diagnose, but is usually identified by your GP from the symptoms you describe.

Treatment is an insecticidal lotion that is applied all over the body. Treatment is more effective if applied to cool dry skin and not after a hot bath/shower.

Apply to the whole body from the chin and ears downwards, paying particular attention to the areas between the fingers and toes and under the nails and areas where there are skin folds.

Permethrin (e.g. A-Scabies, Lyderm) needs to be left on for 8-14 hours. Malathion (e.g. Derbac M, A-Lices) needs to be left on for 24 hours.

If you wash during this time, e.g. hands, you should reapply the treatment.

Shower and wash bedding and clothes following treatment. Carpets and furniture do not need to be fumigated. A repeat treatment after seven days is advised to ensure the treatment is successful.

If you are breastfeeding, pregnant, have an underlying skin condition, or are a child under 2, you should seek medical advice before treatment.

Will I need time off school, childcare or work?

Children should not attend school or preschool until 24 hours after treatment.

The most important aspect of effective scabies treatment is that all household close contacts, even if not symptomatic, are treated on the same day to prevent re-infection.

For further information please contact:



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