



HEALTH INFORMATION

Scabies

What is scabies?

Scabies is caused by a mite. The mite is a parasite, meaning it lives off the host (a human) with no benefit to the host.

Scabies mites are tiny. The female mites tunnel into the skin and lay eggs. About 40-50 eggs are laid in the lifetime of a mite. The eggs hatch into larvae after 3-4 days, these then grow into adults within 10-15 days. Less than one in 10 eggs becomes an adult scabies mite.

Most of the symptoms of scabies infestation are due to the immune system response to the mites themselves, their saliva, their eggs or their faeces.

You need close skin-to-skin contact with an infected person to catch scabies. This is because the scabies mite cannot jump or fly.

What are the symptoms of scabies?

Mite tunnels (burrows) These may be seen on the skin as fine, dark, or silvery lines about 2-10 mm long. They most commonly occur in the loose skin between the fingers (the web spaces), the inner surface of the wrists, and the hands. However, they can occur on any part of the skin.

Itching This is often severe and tends to be in one place at first (often the hands), and then spreads to other areas.

Rash The rash usually appears soon after the itch starts.

Scratching due to intense itching can cause minor skin damage.

Scabies symptoms usually take 2-6 weeks to occur after you are first infected This means that you are infectious (and can spread scabies) before you even know you have scabies.

What is the treatment for scabies?

Scabies is curable The usual scabies treatment is with cream. You can buy products from pharmacies. You can also get them on prescription. They are easy to apply and normally work well if used properly.

Re-apply the same treatment seven days after the first application This helps to make sure that all the mites are killed.

Clothes, towels, and bedlinen should be machine washed at 50°C or above after the first application of treatment. This kills the scabies mites. Keep any items of clothing that cannot be washed, in plastic bags for at least 72 hours to contain the mites until they die. Alternative options to kill any mites on clothes and linen are: ironing the item with a hot iron, dry cleaning, or putting items in a dryer on the hot cycle for 10-30 minutes. It is not necessary to fumigate living areas or furniture, or to treat pets.

It is normal to take up to 2-3 weeks (and sometimes up to six weeks) for the itch to go completely after the mites have been killed by treatment.