

Scabies

What is scabies?

Scabies is an infestation of the skin with the microscopic mite *Sarcoptes scabiae*. The mite penetrates through the skin and digs burrows where female mites lay eggs. After three to four days newly hatched larvae exit the burrow and make their own tunnels through the skin.

Scabies is worldwide and it spreads rapidly where there is frequent skin-to-skin contact between people, such as in hospitals, institutions, child-care facilities, and nursing homes.

Symptoms of scabies infestation:

The most common symptom is intense itching, particularly at night, which may affect all of the body. Small vesicles, burrows, or rash of the skin may be seen in areas such as between the fingers, the hands, the skin folds on the wrist, elbow, armpits, or knee, around the groin, the breast, or shoulder blades. In young children or elderly, mites can be found on the face, ears, and scalp. The rash is an allergic reaction of the body to the mite, its eggs, and waste products deposited under the skin, and may not indicate the site of the skin where the mite has burrowed.

Scratching can cause sores on the body.

These sores can become infected with bacteria. In people with compromised immune system, a more severe and highly contagious form of Scabies may develop with large scales on the skin called crusted Scabies, Hyperkeratotic, or Norwegian scabies.

Incubation Period:

There is an incubation period of two to six weeks before symptoms for those infected for

the first time. When people are re-infested (after they had recovered from the first infestation), the incubation time is shorter, of one to four days.

How are scabies transmitted?

Mites are passed from person to person by direct skin-to-skin contact with a person already infested with scabies. A prolonged or frequent direct skin-to-skin contact and sharing clothing, towels, or linen increases the risk of transmission. A quick handshake or hug will not usually spread infestation. Infestation is easily spread to sexual partners and household members.

Pets do not spread human scabies.

How long will mites live?

Outside from the human skin, mites usually do not survive more than 48-72 hours. When living on a person, an adult female mite can live up to a month.

Can scabies be treated?

Several scabicial creams or lotions are available to treat scabies at the Doctor's recommendation. Always follow the directions provided by your physician or pharmacist.

Apply the medication to the whole clean body and wash off after 8 or 12 hours contact time. Do not apply the cream or lotion immediately after a hot bath or shower. If hands or other sites of the body are washed within the 8-12 hours contact time, reapply the cream or lotion to that area of the skin. Avoid area around the eyes but use cream on face, bottom of feet, palms, ears, and scalp.

It is generally recommended for persons with symptoms of scabies that these products are applied twice - one week apart. Household members of a person with scabies should receive treatment as well, even if they do not have symptoms. Other people with intimate contact within the previous six weeks should also be treated at the same time. It is beneficial for those people to seek guidance from their family Physician. Children and pregnant women must seek medical advice and supervision for treatment.

After washing off the cream or lotion, put on clean clothes. To avoid re-infestation, all clothes, bedding, and towels used by the infested person during the three days before treatment should be washed in hot water and dried in a hot dryer for at least 20 minutes. Dry

clean items that are non-washable, as indicated on the item's tag. Potentially contaminated large items such as furniture or mattresses, should be cleaned, disinfected, and not used for two to three days.

After the treatment:

Itching may continue for two to four weeks, after a successful treatment and it is not an indication of mites' infestation. Your health care provider may prescribe additional medication to relieve itching or dry skin condition.

For more information, please contact
Halton Region
Dial 311 or 905-825-6000
Toll Free: 1-866-442-5866
www.halton.ca

References:

1. CDC-Division of Parasitic Diseases – Scabies, available at: http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dpd/parasites/scabies/factsht_scabies.htm
2. Ontario Hospital Association - Scabies surveillance Protocol for Ontario Hospitals, Feb 2006
3. Health Protection Agency, UK -The Management of Scabies infection in the Community, Oct. 2007. www.hpa.org.uk