
Scabies

Description: Scabies is a skin disease that is caused by a mite, which is an almost invisible organism. The mite lives on the surface of human skin. The female mite burrows (digs a hole) into the skin to lay eggs. The path where the mite burrows may look like a tiny scratch mark.

Symptoms: Symptoms include a patchy red rash with thread-like tracks. The rash usually occurs between the fingers, the inside surfaces of the wrists and forearms, the elbows, under the armpits, waist, thighs, genital area and lower buttocks. The infested areas usually itch intensely, especially at night.

Diagnosis is made by a physician scraping a few tiny specks of skin from an itch area and looking at the skin scraping under a microscope.

How it is Spread: Spread occurs by skin-to-skin contact or contact with undergarments or bedclothes which have been freshly contaminated by an infected person. Pets do not transmit the mite.

Incubation Period: 2-6 weeks for individuals not previously exposed to scabies, 1-4 days for individuals previously exposed (re-infested).

How Long Can a Person Spread the Infection to Others? The infection can be spread at the beginning of the infestation even before symptoms and until the mites and eggs are destroyed by treatment.

Responsibilities of Parents and Caregivers:

- Caregivers should notify parents of exposure to and symptoms of scabies.

Control of Spread:

- Exclude or isolate infested people from other children. They may return on the day following the first treatment.
- Wash or dry clean clothing and bed linen used within the 48 hours prior to the beginning of treatment. The eggs and mites are killed by water temperatures above 120°F for five minutes or longer. Items which can not be washed or dry cleaned should be placed in a sealed plastic bag for three-four days.
- Vacuum or gently iron bed mattresses and upholstered furniture.
- It is not necessary to spray, fumigate or otherwise chemically treat the home or child care center, as this is not effective.
- Notify the local health department of outbreaks, unusual incidence or an epidemic of the condition. (See the ODH Communicable Disease Chart)

Treatment: Proper treatment involves the use of a prescription medication such as Kwell lotion. The lotion should be applied in a thin coat to the entire body from the jaws down. Special attention must be paid to covering all the skin folds and creases and to the areas under the nails. A person may need to be retreated in seven-10 days to kill any newly hatched mites. Because scabies is highly contagious, family members and caregivers should be treated as well. A physician should be consulted before treating a child less than age 2.

- Itching may continue for one to two weeks after treatment.

Comments: People of all ages, sex, race and socioeconomic background can get scabies. Scabies is not a sign of poor personal hygiene.