



INFECTION PREVENTION AND CONTROL

Scabies Patient Information

What is Scabies?

Scabies is related to a mite (tiny bug) called *Sarcoptes scabiei*. It affects people all over the world: young and old, rich and poor.

How do people get Scabies?

Scabies moves from person to person by direct contact with skin (usually sexual partners or people living together); sometimes it involves contact with clothing or bed sheets. A quick handshake or hug will usually not spread the bug; the contact needs to be longer. Scabies can spread in crowded places where close body and skin contact is common. Child care facilities are also a common place for Scabies to spread. Humans are always the host; animals do not spread human Scabies. Without treatment, an infected person can transmit Scabies even with no symptoms.

What are the signs & symptoms of Scabies infestation?

The most common symptoms of Scabies, itching and a skin rash are caused by an allergic reaction to the bug. Severe and constant itching, especially at night, is the first and most common symptom of Scabies. Pimple-like bumps, burrows or rashes are noticed 3 to 6 weeks after the first infection, or 1 to 4 days after other infections. This is because the allergy is stronger after the first infection. Areas most often affected with red, raised, itchy bumps are hands, especially in between fingers, wrists, elbows, knees, feet, armpits, bum and/or waist. Itching is worse at night, and scratching may cause bleeding and sometimes skin infections with bacteria as well.

Crusted (Norwegian) Scabies most commonly occurs in people with weak immune systems, elderly individuals or those who are very sick for a long time. It often appears as a wide-spread rash, with scales and sometimes blisters and scabs or crusts; itching may not be noticed at all. Norwegian Scabies spreads very easily because of the large number of mites in the skin scales.

How is Scabies diagnosed?

Diagnosis of Scabies is usually made by looking carefully at the rash and seeing whether burrows are present. We are pretty sure that Scabies bugs are present when we see the bug itself, or its eggs or poop left behind.

Can Scabies be treated?

Yes. A special skin cream will be applied to all areas of your skin. Your Doctor may ask you to repeat the treatment after one week.

What does the hospital do to prevent the spread of Scabies?

If you are found to have Scabies, you may be moved to a private room, and your Doctors and Nurses and other healthcare workers will care for you wearing gloves and a gown. You will be placed on isolation until your treatment is finished. Your clothes and bed sheets will be changed.

To prevent spreading Scabies you must bath regularly, do not share clothes, towels or bed sheets with others, and limit close physical contact with others until your treatment is finished. During the time you have Scabies, you will be asked to stay in your room, but you will still be able to have visitors. It is very important that visitors clean their hands upon entering and exiting your room. Visitors who touch you will need to wear a gown and gloves.

What special precautions are needed for Scabies at home?

Treatment is recommended for people that live in the same house as you, and for people you have sex with, particularly those who have had long, direct skin-to-skin contact with you when you had the Scabies mites.

All clothes, bedding and towels used during the three days before you were treated should be cleaned by washing in hot water and then drying on the hot setting, or ironing, or by dry cleaning or by leaving them in a tightly sealed plastic bag for at least 3 days. Scabies mites do not normally survive more than 2 to 3 days off a human's body.

If you have questions about the information in this document, contact Queensway Carleton Hospital's Infection Prevention and Control at 613-721-2000, ext. 3777.