

Would you know if you had Scabies?



What is Scabies?

Scabies is a common and very itchy skin condition caused by human scabies mites. It can affect people of any age but is most common in the young and the elderly.

How do Scabies infestations occur?

The mites that cause scabies are tiny parasites. They are usually picked up by direct skin-to-skin contact with someone who already has scabies, and very rarely from objects such as clothing or bedding. Pets do not spread them, and being dirty does not cause scabies.

People with 'classical' scabies have around a dozen adult mites on their skin; a few carry many more. Rarely, a type of scabies called 'crusted' (also known as 'Norwegian' or 'Hyperkeratotic') scabies can occur where thousands of scabies mites in the outer layers of the skin.

Classical Scabies



Crusted/Norwegian scabies



What are the symptoms of scabies?

The first symptom of scabies is very itchy skin - around 2 to 6 weeks after the mites are picked up. The itching affects the body, arms and legs but doesn't usually affect the head and neck, except in infants. The itch often gets worse in bed at night and after warm showers or baths. It is common for several people in the same family or social environment to become itchy at roughly the same time.

A rash will also develop around this time – this is the body’s immune system recognising that a foreign body is present. This itchy rash covers much of the skin but the mites are found mainly in the web spaces of the fingers and on the palms of the hands, the wrists, ankles and soles of the feet. The scabies mites burrow into the skin in these areas to lay their eggs causing a raised, sometimes and will move around sometimes leaving small greyish, or rash lines on the skin called ‘track marks’.

Scabies burrows and track marks



How is Scabies diagnosed?

Your doctor will usually be able to diagnose scabies on the basis of the story and on examination of the rash, however sometimes the skin rash can be mistaken for eczema or psoriasis. Sometimes, to confirm diagnosis, scrapings from a burrow can be looked at under the microscope for mites and their eggs.

What To Do

- See your GP or pharmacist for diagnosis and treatment – remember to tell them about people you have had skin to skin contact with as everyone will require treatment whether they have the symptoms or not
- Treatment will usually be application of a cream or lotion to the skin which should be left on overnight (8 hours) or for a full day before washing off. This will normally kill the mites and eggs if done properly, but should be repeated after 7 days
- Wash all bedding, clothes, towels and materials on a hot wash cycle – if unable to do this, place any items of linen/clothing up in an air tight bag and leave for 3 – 4 days. This will kill the mites and eggs.
- Thoroughly vacuum all areas of the home including curtains, carpets, chairs and couches