

Frequently Asked Questions about...

Scabies

Q. What is scabies?

A. Scabies is an infestation of the skin caused by a small mite. The mites burrow under the skin in order to feed and reproduce, creating small burrows in the outermost layers of the skin.

Q. Where are scabies found?

A. Scabies infestations occur only in humans. Some animals can get a form of mite infestation known as sarcoptic mange, but this is not transmissible to humans. Outbreaks of scabies have occurred in many different healthcare facilities including nursing homes and rehabilitation facilities.

Q. What are the symptoms of scabies infection?

A. Intense itching, often at night, is the most common symptom of scabies infestation. The skin may appear red and bumpy and blisters or rashes may appear. Most often, infestation will occur in areas of skin that have folds or webs such as the underarms, genitalia, thighs, and between fingers and toes. Symptoms appear two to six weeks after infection, but may appear much faster in those who have had scabies before.

Q. How does someone catch scabies?

A. Scabies is most commonly transmitted through direct person-to-person skin contact. Mites do not jump from one person to another, but it is possible to transfer mites on clothing, bedding, or furniture if they have been contaminated by an infested person.

Q. Why may patients in healthcare facilities be at risk for contracting scabies?

A. Patients may have opportunities to have close contact with each other or to share items that have been contaminated with mites, which make it possible to transmit the mites to another person.

Q. Can scabies be treated?

A. Yes. Topical creams are available that must be applied to the entire body in order to kill the mites and eggs. Anyone who has been exposed to an individual with scabies should also be treated to avoid infestation. In cases where a skin infection has developed due to scratching, antibiotics may also be prescribed.

Q. What is the best way to prevent the spread of scabies?

A. The best way to prevent the spread of infestation is to avoid contact with people with scabies until 24 hours after the completion of treatment. Those with scabies should not share personal items, clothing, bedding, linens, or furniture with other people. Potentially contaminated items should be washed in hot water and dried in a hot dryer or placed in a sealed plastic bag for at least 7 days.

Contact your local health department if you have additional questions about scabies