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# What Is Scabies?

Learning how to manage the spread of  
the human itch mite *Sarcoptes scabiei*



# IMPORTANT

Scabies is a human itch mite infection that causes a rash and itching. It can vary in how long it lasts and how bad it gets. If you or someone you know has been told they have scabies, there are steps you can take to avoid spreading it to others.

This booklet was created to help you understand and manage scabies infections. Follow the suggestions listed in this booklet and remember to take care of yourself. Although scabies may make you uncomfortable and cause stress, there are steps you can take to get rid of it successfully. For more information on scabies, please contact your healthcare provider.



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# Learning About Scabies

## What is scabies?

Scabies is caused by an infestation of the human itch mite *Sarcoptes scabiei* that burrows into the upper layer of the human skin where it hatches eggs and reproduces. If you have scabies, you might have a rash and be very itchy.



Scabies mite burrowing in skin and laying eggs

### Types of Scabies:

#### ➤ Classic Scabies

Small red bump rash with a small number of mites (10-15 mites)

#### ➤ Norwegian or Crusted Scabies

Thick crusting on skin that contains a large number of mites

- Human scabies is commonly found worldwide across races and social classes
- Overcrowded conditions contribute to the spread of the infection
- Outbreaks can occur in settings where many people live together such as rehabilitation centers, nursing homes, or assisted living facilities

## What does scabies look like?

The scabies rash is often described as raised red bumps, similar to pimples; in some cases the mite burrows may look like a crooked, raised rash or crusting.



Classic  
Scabies  
with  
burrows

Crusted  
Scabies



## Where is the scabies rash usually found?

### Common Body Areas for Rash:

- Wrist
- Between fingers
- Elbow
- Armpit
- Nipple
- Penis
- Buttocks
- Shoulder blades
- Waist
- Skin folds



- The rash and itching may be on most of the body or may be found only on the common rash sites
- Scabies burrows are most often found in the webbing between the fingers, in the skin folds on the wrist, elbow, or knee, and on the penis, breast, or shoulder blades
- The rash may also be found on the head, face, neck, palms, and soles of infants and very young children, but usually not adults and older children

## How can I get scabies?

### Classic scabies

- Spread by direct and lengthy human skin-to-skin contact with an infected person
- Household members, caregivers, and sexual partners can easily spread the infection to one another
- Casual contact, such as handshakes, does not spread classic scabies

### Crusted scabies

- Can be spread more easily as this type of scabies contains many more mites than the classic type
- Crusted scabies is highly contagious and can be spread though indirect contact such as sharing towels, clothing, or bedding



## Will I always have scabies?

Scabies is a treatable infection. After treatment, most infected people can get rid of the symptoms by 2-4 weeks after the last treatment.

## How contagious am I?

If you have an active infection, scabies is contagious. Classic scabies can only be spread through lengthy direct skin-to-skin contact, while crusted scabies can be spread through direct or indirect contact. Crusted scabies is a highly contagious infection.

- You can be infected with scabies and not know it
- If you have never had scabies before, it can take up to 2 months for symptoms to start
- Even if you do not have symptoms, you can still spread scabies



## How do I know if I have scabies?

- If you have a new rash that looks like scabies, please talk to your doctor
- If your doctor thinks you have an active scabies infection, he or she may choose to confirm the diagnosis by looking for the scabies mite, mite egg, or mite fecal matter
- Your doctor may do this by removing a mite from its burrow or through a skin scraping which takes a tiny amount of your skin's top layer for testing



## How is scabies treated?

Scabies is treated with a product called a *scabicide*, which is prescribed by a doctor. Scabicides kill the scabies mite and the eggs. The scabicide products come with instructions for how to use the treatment that should be carefully followed.

In addition to the infected person, all sexual partners and close personal contacts that have direct skin-to-skin contact need to be treated at the same time to prevent re-infestation.



### Scabicide Creams:

- Always follow the package instructions
- Apply to all parts of body from the neck to the toes
- Infants & young children should have the face & scalp treated in addition to the rest of the body
- Gloves may be used to keep cream between fingers during treatment time
- Be sure to wait for the length of time recommended on the package before washing off the cream
- Put on clean clothing after treatment
- Wash all bedding, clothing, & towels used for the 3 days before treatment

## When should I seek medical care?

- If you think you may have scabies or if you are a close contact of someone who has been told they have scabies, you should seek medical care for treatment
- Scabicides are only available with a doctor's prescription
- All household and close contacts of a person with scabies should be treated at the same time to avoid getting infected again
- If itching continues more than 2-4 weeks after the treatment ended or if new burrows or rash continue to appear, it may be necessary to seek medical care for another treatment

## What do patients and visitors need to do when they go to a healthcare facility?

If you have been told you have scabies or are getting treatment for scabies, it is important that you notify the nursing staff when you enter a healthcare facility.



- If you are in need of healthcare and you currently are infected with scabies, your care providers may need to use personal protective equipment (gloves and gowns) to prevent spread of the infection
- If you do not need healthcare yourself, please wait until your treatment is done before visiting other patients in a healthcare facility to avoid infecting others

### Scabies Self-Care Behaviors:

#### What is the proper way to clean fabrics used by an infected person?

Any bedding, clothes, towels, or fabrics that are used by a person infected with scabies during the 3 days before scabicide treatment need to be cleaned in one of the following ways:

- Washing in hot water and drying in a hot dryer
- Dry cleaning
- Sealing contents in a plastic bag for at least 72 hours

Be sure to wash the infected person's clothes/bedding/towels separately from others. Rooms used by a person with crusted scabies need to be cleaned and vacuumed after use. The use of pesticide sprays or fogs are generally not recommended.

#### Notes for cleaning:

Scabies mites generally will not survive more than 2-3 days away from human skin

#### How often should I change clothes/bedding?

- Change your sheets and towels daily
- Change your clothes daily
- Do not put dirty clothes or clothes you have just worn back in your closet or drawers until they have been washed

## General Healthy Self-Care Behaviors:

### What is the proper way to wash my hands with soap and water?

1. Wet your hands with clean, running water and apply soap
2. Rub your hands together to make a lather and scrub them well
3. Continue rubbing your hands for at least 15-20 seconds
4. Rinse your hands
5. Dry your hands using a clean towel or air dry them



### How should I use alcohol-based hand sanitizer?

1. Apply the product to the palm of one hand
2. Rub your hands together
3. Rub the product over all surfaces of your hands and fingers until your hands are dry

### What is good hand hygiene?

When to wash your hands:

- After using the toilet or helping someone use the toilet
- After touching dirty surfaces and handling soiled laundry
- After handling items soiled by body fluids
- Before and after preparing meals/snacks
- Before eating meals
- Before and after taking or giving medications
- After caring for a sick person
- After playing with pets
- After sneezing, coughing, blowing your nose
- Anytime hands are visibly dirty



## **What is the proper way to clean non-fabric surfaces?**

- Use a cleaner you can buy at the grocery store that has the word “disinfectant” on it
- Remember to read the label and follow the directions
- If using bleach alone, then follow the directions on the label; in general these will be one part bleach to ten parts water (1:10 solution) made fresh daily
- Never mix bleach with other cleaners
- Wet the surface well and clean vigorously
- Allow the surface to air dry
- Pay special attention to toilet, sink and areas that are touched frequently such as door knobs and light switches



### How can I prevent spreading scabies in my home?



Anyone living in a house with an infected person has a higher risk of becoming infected themselves. For this reason all household and close contacts of an infected person need to be treated with scabicide treatment at the same time.

Additionally, all bedding, towels, and clothes used in the 3 days before treatment should be properly cleaned. These steps will help to limit re-infestation of treated persons and the spread of infection to others.

### How can I prevent spreading scabies to others?

The best way to prevent the spread of scabies is to avoid direct skin-to-skin contact with an infected person and to make sure that infected persons and their close contacts are treated quickly.

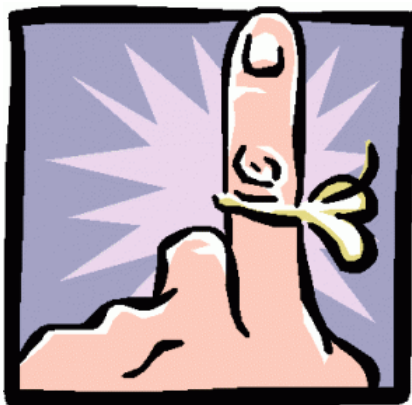


### What about pets and scabies?

A human scabies infection is not spread to or from household pets. Other types of scabies mites may cause infestations in other animals, such as cats, dogs, pigs, and horses; however, these types of scabies do not spread to humans.

### Things to remember about scabies

- Avoid prolonged skin-to-skin contact with others if you have been told you have scabies
- Carefully follow the package directions for correct use of scabicide treatments
- All household and close contacts should be treated with scabicide at the same time to avoid re-infestation
- Wash all clothes, towels, and bedding used in the 3 days before the treatment
- Talk to your doctor if you have any questions or concerns about scabies



## Web Sites/References

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

<http://www.cdc.gov/parasites/scabies/>

Your Local Health Department

<http://www.azdhs.gov/diro/liaison/countymap.htm>

## Acknowledgements

Arizona Healthcare-Associated Infections (HAI) Program

[www.preventHAaz.gov](http://www.preventHAaz.gov)



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