



Health News from the DCF Medical Team

SCABIES

What is Scabies?

Human Scabies is caused by an infestation of the skin by the human itch mite. The Scabies mites burrow into the upper layer of the skin where they live and deposit their eggs. Scabies mites generally do not survive more than 48-72 hours away from human skin. Itching may last for 2-3 weeks. When living on a person, a mite can live up to a month.

How is Scabies spread?

Scabies is spread by direct, prolonged, skin-to-skin contact with a person already infested with Scabies. Contact must be prolonged (a quick handshake or hug will usually not spread infestation). Infestation is easily spread to sexual partners and household members. Infestation may also occur by sharing clothing, towels, and bedding.

Who is at risk for severe infestation?

- ❖ People with weakened immune systems;
- ❖ The elderly; and
- ❖ Those who are in crowded conditions, i.e. nursing homes, prisons, childcare facilities.

What are the signs and symptoms of Scabies infestation?

For a person who has never been infested with Scabies, symptoms may not appear for 4-6 weeks. For a person who has had Scabies, symptoms appear within several days and include:

- ❖ Pimple-like irritations, burrows or rash of the skin, especially the webbing between the fingers and toes; the skin folds on the wrist, elbow, or knees; the penis, the breast, or shoulder blade;
- ❖ Intense itching over most of the body; and
- ❖ Sores on the body caused by scratching can sometimes become infected.

How is Scabies infestation diagnosed?

- ❖ Scabies is diagnosed by observing the appearance and distribution of the the rash and whether there are burrows;
- ❖ Diagnosis should be confirmed by obtaining a skin scraping to examine under a microscope;
- ❖ Diagnoses can be made even if fewer than 10-15 mites are present on an infested person who is otherwise healthy.

What should you do if you get Scabies?

- ❖ Lotions (*scabicides*) that kill mites &/or eggs are used to treat Scabies are available only with a prescription.
- ❖ You need a prescription for all of the products that have been approved to treat Scabies. It is important to follow instructions carefully.
- ❖ Healthcare practitioners often prescribe a milder medication for pregnant women and children.
- ❖ Apply lotion to a clean body from the neck down to the toes, including between fingers and toes, and inside skin folds.
- ❖ Leave lotion on overnight (8 hours). If you wash your hands after application, reapply the medication to your hands again. After 8 hours, take a bath or shower and put on clean clothes. No new burrows or rashes should appear 1-2 days after effective treatment.
- ❖ If itching is severe, your healthcare practitioner may prescribe additional medication to relieve the itching.

How can I prevent Scabies infestation?

- ❖ Avoid direct skin-to-skin contact with an infested person or with clothing or bedding used by an infested person.
- ❖ Treat everyone who has had direct prolonged skin-to-skin contact with the infested person within the preceding month (this includes close friends, day care or school classmates, and day care or nursing home personnel)
- ❖ Wash bedding, clothing, and towels that were used by infested persons or their household, sexual, and close contacts three days before treatment in hot water and dry in a hot dryer, or dry-clean, or seal in a plastic bag for 2 weeks
- ❖ You should vacuum carpets and upholstery. Ideally, you should also vacuum the entire house, and then discard the vacuum bag.

References:

<http://www.cdc.gov/scabies/index.html>; http://www.aad.org/public/publications/pamphlets/common_scabies.html