

# What is SCABIES and how do we get rid of it?



## What is Scabies?

Scabies is a skin condition caused by tiny bugs called mites. The mites dig under your skin and cause itching and irritation.

## Symptoms of Scabies

- The most common symptom is a **very itchy rash** which occurs especially at night. The rash can be anywhere on the body, but is usually on the hands, wrists, chest, genital area and waistline.
- The rash often looks like crooked raised lines made up of tiny blisters or bumps on the skin.
- Symptoms usually begin four to six weeks after the first exposure, but can start much sooner if you have had scabies before.

## How Does it Spread?

- Scabies is spread by prolonged skin-to-skin contact with a person who has scabies. A quick handshake or hug will usually not spread scabies.
- Clothes, towels, bed sheets, etc. may also spread scabies mites if the items were recently in contact with a person who has scabies. The mite can live on clothing and other objects for two to three days.
- Scabies can spread through people in close physical contact like in a family, childcare group, school class or long-term care home.
- Scabies can be spread to other people even before symptoms appear.

## How is Scabies Diagnosed?

Scabies is diagnosed by using a microscope to look for the mite in skin scrapings. Sometimes a healthcare provider who is familiar with scabies will diagnose scabies after looking at the rash and asking about symptoms.

Talk to a healthcare provider if you:

- Are seeing/feeling signs and symptoms of scabies
- Have had close contact to someone who has scabies



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Toronto Dermatology Centre

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## Treatment for Scabies

- There are medications that can kill scabies mites.
- Scabies requires treatment and will not go away on its own
- Several medicated creams or lotions are available to treat scabies. Always follow the instructions provided by the healthcare provider and/or pharmacist.
- Medications taken by mouth are sometimes prescribed if an infected person has a weak immune system or there is an outbreak.

It's important to follow the healthcare provider's instruction for treatment.

Itching may continue for a week or two after treatment; **this does not mean that the treatment did not work.**

If the itching continues after two to four weeks or new itchy rashes are appearing, be reassessed by a healthcare provider as they may consider a different treatment option;

The mites can spread to others, a healthcare provider may recommend treatment for all family members and other close contacts who have prolonged skin to skin contact with the infected person, even if there are no signs of infestation. It is important that this treatment be initiated at the same time for all close contacts.

## How to Prevent Scabies

- Treat other residents that have had direct skin contact or have shared a bed, towels, or clothing at the same time.
- Wash bedding, clothing, and towels in hot water and dry in a hot dryer. Temperatures in excess of 50°C or 122°F for 10 minutes will kill mites and eggs.
- Dry-clean items that can't be washed or seal them in a closed plastic bag for 72 hours to a week.
- Avoid skin-to-skin contact with others and sharing clothing, bedding or towels with others until treatment is complete.
- Notify people that have had direct skin-to-skin contact with the infected individual during the previous two months and encourage them to seek treatment.
- Thorough cleaning and vacuuming of the room if and when a patient/resident with non-crusted scabies leaves the facility or moves to a new room.
- Environmental disinfection is neither necessary nor warranted.
- Discarding mattresses is generally not necessary.

## References

BC Centre for Disease Control. Scabies [Internet]. British Columbia: BC Centre for Disease Control; 2017. Available from: <http://www.bccdc.ca/health-info/diseases-conditions/scabies>

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