

# Getting to know: Scabies

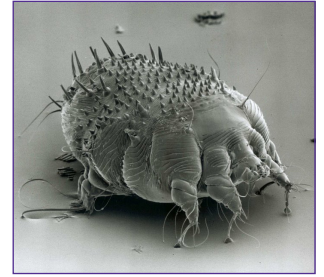


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## What is it?

Scabies is an itchy, highly contagious skin disease caused by an infestation by the itch mite *Sarcoptes scabiei*, a tiny mite which lays eggs in the skin leaving silvery tracks on the skin with a dot at one end.

Scabies are very common, and anyone can contract it. An extremely contagious condition, scabies should be treated quickly to stop it spreading.



## How do we get it?

A very contagious condition, it can be spread by skin to skin contact with an affected person.

Less often, people pick up mites through sharing clothing, bedding and towels which have been used by someone with scabies.

Elderly people, young children and those with weakened immune systems are most susceptible. And people who live or work closely together, such as residents of nursing homes are most at risk. Scabies is most prevalent in the winter months.

## Symptoms

One of the first symptoms is an intense itchy rash, especially at night, when the mites are at their most active. The characteristic rash is not due to the mite itself, rather to an allergic reaction to the mite, its eggs and its faeces.

Scabies can affect any area of the body especially in the moist dark conditions of the folds of the skin. But is most commonly found in the web spaces between the fingers and toes, the wrists, elbows and under the arms.

Complications can include skin infection due to scratching. Scabies can make skin conditions such as eczema or psoriasis worse.

## Treatment

Scabies is treated by a cream or lotion. Permethrin 5% cream is first-line treatment, with malathion aqueous 0.5% used if permethrin is contraindicated or not tolerated.

A Pharmacist can recommend a cream or lotion that will be applied over the whole body, especially the soles of the feet. You will need to repeat the treatment one week later.

Other treatments may include antihistamines to relieve itching, antibiotics for any skin infection, and steroid creams to relieve swelling and itching.

## How to stop the spread of Scabies

It is important staff ensure excellent cross infection practice when a resident, or residents, have been diagnosed as having scabies.

Frequent hand washing and the use of personal protective equipment should be strictly adhered to. Gloves should be worn when caring for the resident(s) and up to 24 hours after initial treatment.

All bedding, clothing, and towels (and those of all potentially infested contacts) should be decontaminated by washing at a high temperature (at least 60°C) and drying in a hot dryer, or dry-cleaning, or by sealing in a plastic bag for at least 72 hours to allow the mites to die off.



*Scabies rash spreading and turning red*

## Who else should be treated?

It is advisable that all people living in the care home or ward and all close contacts should receive treatment even if they have no symptoms. This is because it can take up to six weeks to develop symptoms after you become infected.

Close contacts may be infected, but have no symptoms, and may pass on the mite. Everyone should be treated on the same day.

Post scabies itch can continue for up to 4 weeks. Skin that has not healed within one month may still be infected with scabies mites and you should consult your GP for further advice.