

What is scabies?

Scabies is a skin disease caused by an almost invisible bug called a mite. Scabies mites burrow under the skin, producing pimple-like bumps.

What are the symptoms of scabies?

The major symptom of scabies is intense itching, particularly at night. In adults, the areas of the skin most affected by scabies include the webs and sides of the fingers, wrists, elbows, armpits, waist, genitals, breasts and lower buttocks. In children, the feet and toes are also commonly affected.

How soon do symptoms appear?

Symptoms will appear in 2 - 6 weeks in people who have never had scabies. People who have had scabies before may show symptoms within 1 - 4 days.

How is scabies spread?

Scabies mites spread by direct skin-to-skin contact. Transfer of scabies from undergarments or bedclothes can happen only if these are reused immediately after being used by an infected person. Scabies can also be spread during sexual contact.

Who gets scabies?

Anyone can get scabies. Scabies most commonly occurs in nursing homes, institutions and child care centers.

How long is a person infectious?

A person can spread scabies until mites and eggs are destroyed by effective treatment.

What is the treatment for this illness?

Skin products are available from a doctor for the treatment of scabies. The products are generally applied to the whole body except the face and neck. Always follow label instructions. A few persons may require a second treatment 7 - 10 days later. Itching may continue during and for several days after treatment. Skin care is important to reduce itching due to skin dryness, which may be caused by the treatment. Clothes and bedding should be washed using the hot cycle of both the washer and dryer.

Do infected people need to be excluded from school, work, or child care?

People may return to school, work, or a child care center after receiving an initial treatment.

What can be done to help prevent the spread of scabies?

Avoid direct physical contact with people who have scabies and their belongings, especially clothing and bedding. Early proper treatment of infested persons is extremely important to stop the spread of scabies.