

FACT SHEET

Scabies (from Web MD)

Topic Overview

Scabies is a very itchy skin condition caused by tiny mites that burrow into the outer layers of the skin. The barely visible scabies mites are attracted to the warmth and smell of a person and typically are spread through close contact with an affected person. Female mites burrow into the skin, creating small, threadlike tunnels that can sometimes be seen on the skin. The mites lay eggs and leave feces in these tunnels. It is also possible for scabies mites to spread to another person via shared personal belongings, such as towels and linens.

Scabies causes severe itching that is usually worse at night.

- It usually affects several family members at one time.
- The itching can be more severe in small children and older adults. Children tend to have the most severe skin reactions to scabies.

Contagious and incubation periods

- Scabies is contagious; mites can be spread to other people as long as a person remains infested and untreated, including during the period before symptoms appear.
- It takes 4 to 6 weeks from the time of initial infestation for scabies symptoms to develop (incubation period). People who become reinfested develop symptoms within a few days.

Symptoms

The most common scabies symptom is **severe itching** caused by an allergic reaction to the scabies mite and its feces. Itching may begin before any skin sores appear. It tends to be worse at night or after a hot shower. Some people have mild or no itching throughout the course of scabies infestation.

Young children are commonly affected:

- Between the fingers and on the palm side of the wrists.
- On the outside surfaces of the elbows and in the armpits.
- Around the waistline and navel.
- The scalp, neck, and face.
- The palms of the hands.
- The soles of the feet.

In most cases, scabies itching will persist for days to weeks after successful scabies treatment. This is due to an ongoing allergic reaction to the mite bites. The allergic reaction usually subsides over time once the mites have been killed. In addition to the person with scabies, anyone who has been in close physical contact with that person should also be treated. This may include several members of the same household, including anyone who has prolonged skin-to-skin contact (sleeping, bathing, or holding hands) with that person.