

Other treatments

There are other treatments available including malathion lotion (brand name Derbac M) and a tablet called ivermectin (please get further information from your doctor).

Who else needs to be treated?

In single cases of scabies other members of your family and sexual partners should be treated at the same time. When more than one person is involved, then everyone who has been in contact should be treated within 24 hours.

When will the symptoms disappear?

The itching will often continue for two to three weeks after treatment. Your GP should also be able to prescribe creams, such as a mild steroid cream, to help reduce itchiness. Calamine lotion, available without a prescription at pharmacies, may also help relieve itchy skin. Oral antihistamines can also be used to help control itching and enable you to get a better night's sleep.

Further information

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Scabies

A patient's guide



What is scabies and how is it treated?

This leaflet aims to help you understand more about the cause, diagnosis and management of scabies.

What is scabies?

Scabies is a contagious skin condition which is caused by tiny mites called *Sarcoptes scabiei*. The mites burrow into the upper layer of the skin and the females lay two to three eggs a day in the burrow. The main symptoms are a skin rash where the mites have burrowed and intense itching.

What does it look like?

Scabies usually produces a red scaly rash. Sometimes tiny blisters appear. Tiny burrows can often be seen just below the surface of the skin. The sites commonly affected are the folds of skin particularly spaces between the fingers, the feet and genitals.

What are the symptoms?

The intense itching associated with scabies is thought to be caused by an allergic reaction to the mites. The itch is often worse at night.

How is scabies spread?

Scabies can be spread through:

- long periods of skin-to-skin contact with an infected person

- sexual contact with an infected person

The mites cannot fly or jump. Transmission from clothing is possible but most mites die within one to two days away from the skin.

What is the incubation period?

The incubation period is usually between one and six weeks before the symptoms start.

How is it diagnosed?

The diagnosis of scabies is usually made from examining the skin. A special instrument to magnify your skin may be used to see the mites. On some occasions, a skin sample may be taken to confirm the diagnosis under a microscope.

When is it not contagious?

Scabies is contagious from the onset of the infestation until 24 hours after the first treatment. Asymptomatic individuals may still be contagious as it can take weeks to develop symptoms.

How is it treated?

The two most widely used treatments for scabies are special lotions or creams which contain insecticides that kill the scabies mite. It is important to read the instructions carefully.

At the time of the treatment, it is important to wash your clothes and bed linen using a hot wash (higher than 50°C).

Patients in hospital found to have scabies will be looked after in a side room until the treatment has been completed.

Permethrin cream

Remove all watches and jewellery. Trim finger and toenails. If your hands are washed during treatment, the cream must be reapplied.

Apply the cream all over the body (except the head) and leave on for 8-12 hours. Ensure the skin is cool and dry when the lotion is put on. In some cases the head is treated as well. The treatment will often be repeated in seven days.

A rare but more severe form of scabies can develop in cases where there are a high number of mites in the skin. This is called Norwegian scabies or crusted scabies and can affect older people and those with a lowered immune system (the body's natural defence against infection and illness).

For this type of scabies, the cream may need to be reapplied after three days and repeated again three days later.