

Scabies

Scabies is a contagious skin condition caused by tiny mites that burrow into the skin.

The main symptom of scabies is intense itching that's worse at night. It also causes a skin rash on areas where the mites have burrowed.

What are Scabies mites?

Scabies mites are called *Sarcoptes scabiei*. They feed using their mouths and front legs to burrow into the outer layer of skin (epidermis), where they lay eggs. After three to four days, the baby mites (larvae) hatch and move to the surface of the skin, where they mature into adults. Scabies like warm places, such as skin folds, between the fingers, under fingernails, or around the buttock or breast creases. They can also hide under watch straps, bracelets or rings.



How is scabies spread?



Scabies is usually spread through prolonged periods of skin-to-skin contact with an infected person, or through sexual contact.

It's also possible – but rare – for scabies to be passed on by sharing clothing, towels and bedding with someone who's infected.

It can take up to eight weeks for the symptoms of scabies to appear after the initial infection. This is known as the incubation period.

What are the symptoms of scabies?

- Itching - This is the main symptom of scabies. This is often severe and tends to be in one place at first (often the hands), and then spreads to other areas. The itch is generally worse at night and after a hot bath.
- Mite tunnels (burrows) - These may be seen on the skin as fine, dark, or silvery lines about 2-10 mm long.
- Rash - The rash usually appears soon after the itch starts. It is typically a blotchy, lumpy red rash that can appear anywhere on the body.
- Aggravation of pre-existing skin conditions - Scabies can worsen the symptoms of other skin conditions.



What does it look like?



Typical mite tunnels either side of the wrist crease



Typical rash that occurs as a reaction to the mites

Treating scabies

Visit your GP if you think you have scabies. It's not usually a serious condition, but it does need to be treated.

The two most widely used treatments for scabies are permethrin cream and malathion lotion (brand name Derbac M). Both medications contain insecticides that kill the scabies mite.

Re-apply the same treatment seven days after the first application. This helps to make sure that all the mites are killed.

Daily hot baths, and scrubbing with soap and water will NOT cure a scabies infestation.

Insecticide MUST be used.

Tips for treatment

- Make sure you understand how to apply the product, it is important to be exact with this so that the treatment is effective. Do not miss awkward places.
- Use enough product, an adult needs 30g of cream or 100ml of lotion for one application
- Apply cream or lotion to cool dry skin
- The cream or lotion should be left on for the full recommended time.
- If you wash your hands or any other part of your body during the treatment period, you should re-apply the cream or lotion to the washed areas.
- Clothes, towels, and bed linen should be machine-washed at 50°C or above after the first application of treatment. This kills the scabies mites. Keep any items of clothing that cannot be washed, in plastic bags for at least 72 hours to contain the mites until they die.
- Some people who develop a secondary skin infection may also need antibiotics. If you suspect this is the case, you should consult a doctor.