

# Scabies

## What Are Scabies?

Scabies is a skin infection caused by a small insect-like parasite called a mite that burrows under the skin to lay its eggs. These mites need the human body to survive or else they do not survive more than 48 to 72 hours. When on a human body, a female mite can live for up to a month.

Crusted (Norwegian) scabies is a severe form of scabies that can occur in people who have a weak immune system, are elderly, disabled, and fragile. In Norwegian scabies, the crusts of skin contain large numbers of mites and eggs.

## What Are the Signs and Symptoms of Scabies?

Some people may not know they have scabies. The first sign is intense itchiness that is often worse at night. Tiny burrows or a rash often comes with the itchiness. The rash may look like small, red, slightly raised spots or streaks in the skin. The rash is usually between fingers, wrists, elbows, breasts, genitals, back and buttocks. Symptoms often take four to six weeks to appear if the person has never been infected. If a person has had scabies in the past, symptoms can occur within several days.

## How Are Scabies Spread?

Scabies are highly contagious and infection is not specific to gender, race or hygiene level. The mites are spread by direct, skin-to-skin contact with the person who is infected. Mites can also be transferred from bedding, towels or personal belongings that were used immediately before by the infected person. Mites are passed easily to sexual or household contacts of the infected person, even if there are no symptoms. People infected with crusted (Norwegian) scabies are very contagious to other persons because they have such large numbers of mites on their body.

## What Special Precautions Are Required for Norovirus? What Do I Need to Know?

Together we can take steps to stop the spread of scabies to other patients in the hospital:

- You will stay in a room by yourself until 24 hours after treatment was applied;
  - For crusted scabies, precautions may be removed once skin scraping test is negative;
- Everyone who cares for you or visits you will wear gloves and a long-sleeved gown;
- A sign for “Contact Precautions” will be placed on your door to remind everyone who enters your room about the special steps;

- Housekeeping will vacuum your room;
- Your room and the equipment used in your room will be cleaned and disinfected regularly; and
- Everyone who leaves your room will clean their hands.

## What About My Family and Visitors?

Family and friends can still visit you in the hospital. The signs outside your room will show how to safely wear the gloves and gown. Before leaving your room, your family and visitors must remove the gloves and gown. Then, they must clean their hands with alcohol hand rub. We ask that your family and visitors not assist other patients. Instead, they can assist by using the call bell to ask for help.

## What Is Good Hand Cleaning?

Our staff welcomes reminders to clean our hands. We invite you to ask anyone who enters your room to clean their hands before and after they touch you. Ask any staff member to show you good hand cleaning (20 seconds of soap and running water OR waterless alcohol hand rub for 20 seconds until hands are dry). Please clean your hands often and ask for help to clean your hands if needed:

- After using the bathroom;
- After blowing your nose;
- Before eating and drinking;
- Before and after you touch your dressing or wounds;
- When your hands are visibly dirty; and
- Before you leave your room.

## What Is the Treatment for Scabies?

Treatment is a cream that is prescribed by your doctor. Household members, sexual contacts, and others who have had direct skin-to-skin contact must also be treated at the same time to prevent possible re-infection. Those who are infected generally must be treated at least twice, one week apart. You do not become immune to scabies.

## What Will Happen at Home?

If you have scabies we recommend the following:

- Bedding and clothing worn or used next to the skin anytime during the three days before treatment should be machine washed and dried using the hot water and hot dryer cycles or be dry-cleaned;
- Items that cannot be dry-cleaned or machine washed can be stored in a closed plastic bag for several days to a week;
- Children and adults usually can return to child care, school, or work the day after treatment; and
- Visitors should be limited until scabies is cleared.

Questions? Infection Prevention and Control department 519-464-4400 Ext. 5253.

### References:

Centers for Disease Control: Scabies (November 2, 2010) <https://www.cdc.gov/parasites/scabies/index.html>