

What is scabies?

- Scabies is a skin infection.

Illini Pediatrics, LLC
Joseph E. Cangas, M.D.
107 N. Main St, Ste 2B
Columbia, IL 62236
(618) 281-HEAL (4325)

What causes scabies?

- A tiny insect called a mite causes scabies.
- Mites burrow under the skin to live and reproduce.
- The symptoms of scabies are caused by an allergic reaction to the mites.

Who can get scabies?

- Anyone can get scabies.
- Being unclean or dirty does not cause infection.
- Children are more likely than adults to get scabies because they play close to one another.
- Pets can't get scabies or spread the infection.

What are the symptoms of scabies?

- The most typical sign of scabies is an itchy rash or small, itchy blisters.
- Blisters may break when your child scratches them. Skin may become thick, scaly, and have scratch marks.
- Young children usually get the rash on their hands, feet, armpits, and sometimes their scalp and face.
- Older children usually get the rash on their wrists, elbows, armpits, breasts, groin, genitals, and between the fingers.
- The mite's burrows look like short, dark, wavy lines on the skin. These are usually found between the fingers and around the wrists.
- Itching is worst at night or after a bath. Itching can make it hard to sleep.
- Scabies does not cause fever.

Is scabies contagious?

- Yes. Scabies is contagious.
- Tell your child's school or daycare if your child has scabies. Other children should be checked and treated if needed.
- Scabies is spread through direct contact (skin to skin) with a person who has scabies.
- It can also be spread by sharing the same bed or through sexual contact.
- Scabies can live on items used by an infected person. Contact with these items can spread infection.
- A person with scabies can spread the infection before his symptoms have started.
- After treatment, a person is still contagious for 2-4 hours.

How is scabies treated?

- Everyone in your house should be treated for scabies at the same time whether they have symptoms or not.
- Scabies is treated with medicated cream prescribed by a doctor. It must be put on correctly to work.
- Rub the medicated cream over the entire body except the face and scalp.
- Rub the cream between fingers, toes, on the genitals, and under the fingernails.
- Wash the cream off with soap and water 8-12 hours after putting it on.
- The medicated cream could make the skin dry and cause itching.
- The day after treatment, you can use lotion (such as Lubriderm or Aveeno) for dry skin. Oatmeal baths and mild soap (such as Dove) can also help ease itching.

- Anti-itch medications (such as Benadryl or Atarax) can help ease itching. These may help children sleep if given just before bedtime.
- Keep your child's fingernails short to cut down on scratching.
- Put mittens or socks on your child's hands before he goes to bed, especially if he sucks his thumb.

How long does scabies last?

- One treatment will usually cure the infection.
- Your child can go back to school or daycare the day after treatment.
- Itching may last for several weeks while the skin heals.
- Don't put medicated cream on again unless directed by the doctor.
- Scratch marks will usually go away one or two weeks after treatment. It may take up to 2 months.

Can I prevent scabies?

- There are a number of things you can do to prevent the spread of scabies.
- Personal and household items should be washed to keep scabies from spreading.
- Items should be washed in hot water, put in a hot dryer, or dry cleaned.
- Seal items that can't be washed in plastic bags for two weeks. Mites will usually die after 3 or 4 days off the skin.
- Vacuum furniture and carpeting. Do not spray the house with chemicals.
- Teach your child not to share personal items with an infected person.
- If scabies is not treated it can lead to more infections.

When should I call the doctor?

- Call the doctor if your child has a skin itch.
- Call the doctor if you're worried about your child's infection.
- Call the doctor if skin looks infected or if the itchy rash has spread.
- Call the doctor if your child's symptoms have worsened or not improved after 2 weeks.
- Pregnant women and children under 2 years old may not be able to use medicated cream. Talk to the doctor about treatment.

Quick Answers

- Scabies is a skin infection caused by a tiny insect called a mite.
- The symptoms of scabies are caused by an allergic reaction to the mites.
- Anyone can get scabies. Being unclean or dirty does not cause infection.
- Scabies is contagious. It is spread through contact with infected person or items.
- Scabies is treated with medicated cream prescribed by a doctor.
- One treatment will usually cure the infection although itching may last for several weeks.
- Personal and household items should be washed to keep scabies from spreading.
- Call the doctor if you think your child has scabies.

References

- The Children's Hospital, Boston, "Scabies," (Virtual children's Hospital) 1993. URL: <http://www.vh.org/Patients/IHB/Peds/Infectious/Scabies1.html>
- KidsHealth, "Scabies," 1995-2000. URL: http://www.kidshealth.org/PageManager.jsp?dn=KidsHealth&lic=1&ps=107&cat_id=&article_set=22947
- Pediatric Infectious Diseases Journal, "Scabies (Itch Mite Infestation)," (Virtual Children's Hospital). URL: <http://www.vh.org/Patients/IHB/Peds/Infectious/Scabies2.html>