



# Scabies Fact Sheet

## What is scabies?

Scabies is a skin disease caused by an almost invisible bug called a mite. Scabies mites burrow under the skin, producing pimple-like bumps.

## Who gets scabies?

Anyone can get scabies. Institutions such as nursing homes, extended-care facilities, and prisons are often sites of scabies outbreaks due to the crowded conditions. Some immunocompromised, elderly, disabled, or debilitated persons are at risk for a severe form of scabies called crusted, or Norwegian, scabies.

## How is scabies spread?

The scabies mite almost always is passed by direct, prolonged, skin-to-skin contact with a person who already is infested. Transfer of scabies from undergarments or bedclothes can happen only if these are reused immediately after an infected person. Scabies in adults frequently is sexually acquired.

## What are the symptoms of scabies?

The major symptoms of scabies is intense itching and a rash. In adults, the areas of the skin most affected by scabies include between the fingers, wrist, elbow, armpit, waist, shoulder blades, and buttock. The head, face, neck, palms, and soles often are involved in infants and very young children, but usually not adults and older children.

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### **How soon do symptoms appear?**

Symptoms will appear in 2 to 6 weeks in people who have never had scabies. People who have had scabies before may show symptoms within 1 to 4 days.

### **How long is a person able to spread scabies?**

A person can spread scabies until mites and eggs are destroyed by treatment. An infested person can transmit scabies, even if they do not have symptoms. A person with crusted (Norwegian) scabies can spread the infestation by brief skin-to-skin contact or by exposure to bedding, clothing, or even furniture that he/she has used.

### **What is the treatment for scabies?**

Products used to treat scabies are called scabicide. They are only available with a doctor's prescription. Scabicide should be applied to all areas of the body from the neck down to the feet and toes. When treating infants and young children, it should be applied to their entire head and neck. Only permethrin or sulfur ointment may be used in infants. Sometimes itching may continue for days after treatment. In a few persons, treatment with lotion for a second time 7 to 10 days later may be needed. Treatment also is recommended for household members and sexual contacts. Clothes and bedding should be washed in hot water after each treatment.

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### **What can be done to stop the spread of scabies?**

Avoid physical contact with people who have scabies and do not share their belongings, especially clothing and bedding. The mites can survive only 3 days off the body and cannot jump or fly. Bedding and clothing worn or used next to the skin should be machine washed and dried using the hot water and hot dryer cycles or be dry-cleaned. Early proper treatment of infested persons is extremely important to stop the spread of scabies.

### **Should people with scabies attend school or a daycare center?**

People may return to school or a daycare center after receiving treatment.

*For further information, contact the  
Oklahoma City-County Health Department  
(405) 425-4437*

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