

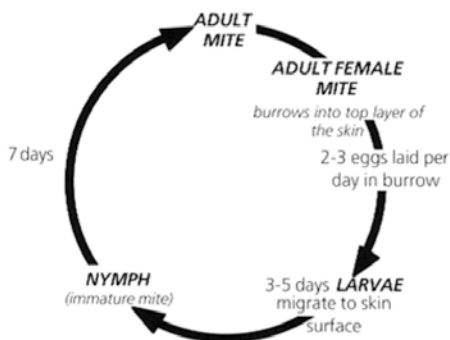
# Scabies

**Scabies is an infestation of the skin by a tiny mite. It usually causes a very itchy skin rash. Scabies is not due to poor hygiene. It is very infectious and can be caught by anyone. A pharmacist can advise on safe and effective treatment.**

## The scabies mite

The scabies mite is a parasite that lives on and burrows into the top layer of human skin. Female scabies mites lay their eggs in burrows in the top layer of skin. The scabies mite can only live on people and is different to animal mites.

The scabies mite cannot jump or fly. It is usually caught by direct skin-to-skin contact with an infested person. It can also be caught from clothing, bedding, towels and other items used by an infested person. Scabies spreads easily between people in the same household and in schools, nursing homes and close knit communities.



## Signs and symptoms

The scabies mite usually triggers an allergic skin reaction which causes intense itching and a rash. However, the itching and the rash sometimes develop several weeks after the infestation has started.

- **Intense itching.** Itching usually occurs in the areas of the burrows and can also develop on other skin areas. It may affect the whole body. It is usually worse at night and when the skin is warm (e.g. after exercise or a shower).
- **Skin rash.** The rash is usually red, blotchy and lumpy. It usually occurs in the areas of the burrows and can also develop on other skin areas. It often occurs on the hands and wrists.
- **Burrows.** Mite burrows look like fine greyish-coloured tracks or lines on the skin. The lines are raised, wavy and up to 1cm long. They can often be seen between the fingers and on the inner sides of the wrists.

Scabies most often affects the skin between the fingers, the inner sides of the wrists and elbows, the hands, armpits, feet, ankles, groin area, buttocks, abdomen, male genitals and women's nipples.

## Treating scabies

The scabies mite can usually be killed with a special lotion or cream. The lotion or cream must be applied over the whole body, from the jaw-line to the toes, including areas that are not itchy. If the scabies infestation is above the neck, treatment may also need to be applied to the scalp and face. Improvement usually occurs 1-2 days after treatment. Some people need to apply the treatment a second time (seven days later). Ask a pharmacist or doctor for advice.

## Follow the instructions

There are several different types of anti-scabies products. It is important to follow the specific directions for the product you are using. General instructions include:

- Apply the cream or lotion to clean, cool, dry skin
- If using a lotion, pour the preparation into a bowl
- The treatment may be more easily applied using a clean paintbrush, cotton wool or a shaving brush
- Start at the chin and apply downwards and outwards over the whole body. Some people may also need to apply the treatment to their scalp, face and ears. Ask a doctor or pharmacist for advice
- Include the soles of the feet, the back, in skin folds, in the belly button, between the buttocks, under breasts and external genital areas. You may need help to apply the treatment to hard-to-reach areas
- Finish applying the treatment between the fingers and toes, and under the nails
- Leave treatment on for the recommended time (e.g. overnight). Reapply it after washing any area of skin (e.g. hands)
- Do not get cream or lotion in your eyes, mouth or nose, or use it on mucous membranes or broken skin.

## Self care

- Try not to scratch your skin as this can lead to bacterial infection of the rash.
- The itch and rash may continue for several weeks after treatment, even if all the mites have been killed. Sometimes this is a side effect of the treatment. Ask a pharmacist for a product that will relieve the itch.
- Stop scabies from spreading. Everyone who has had close physical contact with an infested person needs to be treated, even if they are not itchy. This includes relatives, carers and friends who live in the same house or visit regularly. Sexual contacts also need to be treated. All members of the same household should be treated on the same day.
- Wash and dry all bedding, towels, clothing and soft toys on hot machine settings the morning after each treatment. Wash in hot water, or use heat from an iron or a hot clothes dryer. Dry cleaning also kills the mites and eggs.
- Any bedding, towels, clothing or soft toys that cannot be washed should be stored in tightly sealed plastic bags for one week. Mites and eggs will die during this time.
- Not all rashes that itch are caused by scabies, so check with a doctor or pharmacist before using a scabies treatment.

## Important

Consult a doctor or pharmacist if:

- A person needing scabies treatment is pregnant, breastfeeding, a child under two years, frail elderly or has a weakened immune system
- Weeping, yellow discharge or yellow crusts develop on the skin, as this may be a sign of bacterial infection of the scabies rash
- Itching continues for longer than 4 weeks after treatment.

**Note:** A person with scabies should stay home from childcare, school or work until the day after treatment has started. The childcare centre or school should be notified of a case of scabies.



## For more information

### **Australasian College of Dermatologists**

Website: [www.dermcoll.asn.au/public/a-z\\_of\\_skin.asp](http://www.dermcoll.asn.au/public/a-z_of_skin.asp)

### **DermNet NZ**

Website: [www.dermnetnz.org](http://www.dermnetnz.org)

### **Healthdirect Australia**

Phone: 1800 022 222

Website: [www.healthinsite.gov.au](http://www.healthinsite.gov.au)

### **Consumer Medicine Information (CMI)**

Your pharmacist can advise on CMI leaflets.

### **NPS: Better choices, Better health**

Phone: 1300 MEDICINE (1300 633 424)

Website: [www.nps.org.au](http://www.nps.org.au)

### **The Poisons Information Centre**

In case of poisoning phone 13 11 26 from anywhere in Australia.

*Pharmacists are medicines experts.  
Ask a pharmacist for advice when  
choosing a medicine.*

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