

Patient Information Leaflet: Scabies

What is Scabies?

Scabies is a highly contagious skin condition caused by a microscopic mite called *Sarcoptes scabiei*. These mites burrow into the upper layer of the skin, leading to intense itching and a rash. Scabies can affect anyone, regardless of personal hygiene or socio-economic status, and is commonly spread in crowded conditions, such as nursing homes, childcare facilities, and among family members. It is also very common amongst university students.

Causes and Transmission:

Scabies is primarily transmitted through prolonged skin-to-skin contact with an infected person. It can also spread through sharing clothing, bedding, or towels with an infected individual. It is important to note that scabies cannot be spread through casual contact and is not caused by poor hygiene.

Symptoms:

- **Intense Itching:** The most common symptom, often worsening at night.
- **Rash:** Red, itchy bumps or blisters; often includes small, raised, and inflamed areas or a pimple-like rash.
- **Burrowing Tracks:** Small, thread-like tunnels under the skin, typically seen in areas where the mites are active (such as between fingers, wrists, elbows, armpits, buttocks, and genitals).
- **Secondary Infections:** Scratching can lead to bacterial infections in the affected skin areas, potentially resulting in complications.

Diagnosis:

A dermatologist can diagnose scabies through a physical examination and by reviewing your symptoms. Video-dermoscopy or handheld dermoscopy is often used to visualise the mites, particularly at the end of a burrow. In some cases, a skin scraping may be taken to identify the presence of mites or eggs, under a microscope.

Management and Treatment:

Effective treatment for scabies usually involves prescription medications that eliminate the mites. Common options include:

1. **Topical Permethrin Cream:** This is the most commonly prescribed treatment for scabies. It is applied to the entire body from the neck down and left on for 8-14 hours before washing off. A second application is usually recommended after one week. There can be resistance to permethrin which can lead to the treatment being ineffective.
2. **Other topical treatments:** Malathion or Benzyl benzoate can also be used as a neck down all over body treatment as an alternative to Permethrin.
3. **Oral Ivermectin:** In severe cases or for outbreaks, your doctor may prescribe oral ivermectin, which can be effective in treating scabies.
4. **Antihistamines:** Over-the-counter antihistamines may help relieve itching and discomfort associated with the rash.
5. **Antibiotics:** If a secondary bacterial infection occurs due to scratching, antibiotics may be prescribed.



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Self-Care and Prevention:

- **Avoid Close Contact:** Individuals diagnosed with scabies should avoid close skin contact until treatment is complete and the infestation is cleared.
- **Wash Clothing and Bedding:** All clothing, bedding, and towels used by an infected person should be washed in hot water and dried in a hot dryer. Items that cannot be washed should be sealed in a plastic bag for at least 72 hours to kill the mites.
- **Clean Living Areas:** Vacuum carpets and upholstered furniture to remove any mites that may have fallen off. Disinfect surfaces as appropriate.
- **Use soap substitutes to wash and moisturisers to restore skin barrier function:** The chemicals used are very harsh on the skin. Patients who use multiple treatments can end up with dry and irritable skin. Using a soap substitute to wash with and regular moisturisers can help restore normal skin function and help with the itch and dryness.

When to Seek Medical Advice:

- If you experience severe itching, rash, or any signs of secondary infection (such as increased redness, swelling, or discharge).
- If symptoms persist after treatment or you have concerns about scabies and its management.

Conclusion:

Scabies is a treatable condition that can cause significant discomfort and itching. With proper diagnosis and treatment, you can effectively eliminate the mites and prevent further transmission. If you have any questions or concerns about scabies, please consult your dermatologist for further guidance and support.

