



## Say No to Infection Suspected/confirmed Scabies Fact Sheet

### What is Scabies?

**Scabies** is a contagious skin condition caused by tiny mites that burrow into the skin. Scabies mites are called "Sarcoptic Scabiei". The mites use their mouths and front legs to burrow into the outer layer of skin (epidermis), where they feed and lay their eggs. After three to four days, the baby mites (larvae) hatch and move to the surface of the skin where they mature into adults.

### Types of scabies:

**Classical scabies** found in people with healthy immune systems. Mites may be fewer in numbers approximately 15 to 20 per person. Itching can start between 2 - 8 weeks following initial acquisition of the infection. Sites of the rash may not correspond to the sites of the mites. It is always bilaterally symmetrical, that is, it is found equally on both sides of the body. However, it does not appear in the centre of the back or chest.

**Crusted (Norwegian) scabies**, this can occur in people with an impaired immune system. A diagnosis by a Dermatologist is essential. Highly contagious, it usually presents itself in the form of 'crusted lesions' which are found mainly around the wrist areas but can also affect other parts of the body. A rash is usually found covering the body which appears crusted but may not be itchy. Thousands or millions of mites can be present and can disseminate into the immediate environment due to the shedding of skin from the crusted lesions, surviving for a day or two in warm conditions. Management and treatment of this form of scabies must be undertaken in association with your local Infection Prevention and Control Team (IPCT) or UK (HSA) and Dermatologist.

### What are the symptoms?

The main symptom of scabies is intense itching that's worse at night when the skin is warm. It also causes a skin rash on areas where the mites have burrowed. It may take four to six weeks before the itching starts. This is because the itching is caused by the body's allergic response to the faeces and saliva of the mite, and it can take up to six weeks for this reaction to occur in people who have never previously had scabies. This is known as the incubation period. People who have had scabies before will often display these symptoms earlier, within 2-3 weeks if they have contact with an infected person and go on to develop this infestation again.

### What does Scabies look like?

The mite itself is microscopic and therefore not able to be seen with the naked eye. The scabies rash consists of tiny red spots. Scratching the rash may cause crusty sores to develop. Burrow marks can be found anywhere on the body. They're usually short (approximately 1cm or less), wavy, silver-coloured lines on the skin, with a black dot at one end that can be seen with a magnifying glass.

**In adults, burrow marks often appear in the following areas:**

- the folds of skin between fingers and toes
- the palms of the hands
- the soles and sides of the feet
- the wrists or the elbows
- around the nipples (in women)
- around the genital area (in men)

The rash usually affects the whole of the body, apart from the scalp in those with hair.

**In particular the following areas are often affected:**

- Under the arms
- Around the waist
- The inside of the elbow
- The lower buttocks
- The lower legs
- The soles of the feet
- The knees
- The shoulder blades
- The female genital area and the groins
- Around the ankles



**How does Scabies spread?**

Scabies mites can't fly or jump, which means they can only move from one human body to another through prolonged periods of skin-to-skin contact with an infected person.

**Examples of how scabies mites can be transmitted are:**

- Holding hands with an infected person for a prolonged period, the contact must be prolonged, e.g., 2 -6 minutes or more, to give the mites time to transfer on to the new host.
- Having sex with an infected person.
- Sharing clothing, towels, and bedding with an infected person (although this is rare, see below).

Scabies is host specific i.e., it lives only on humans. Therefore, scabies cannot be caught from pets or other animals.

It's also possible, but rare, for scabies to be passed on by sharing clothing, towels, and bedding with someone who is infected as the scabies mite can survive for 24-36 hours outside the human body.

It's unlikely that scabies will be transmitted through brief physical contact, such as shaking hands or hugging.

Scabies infestations can spread quickly because people are usually unaware, they have the condition until several weeks after the initial infection.

There's an increased risk of catching scabies in confined environments, such as schools and nursing homes, where people are in close proximity to one another.

## How is scabies treated?

Lotions and creams are commonly used to treat scabies or cream. The residents GP or UK (HSA) will be able to advise you about which treatment to use.

To prevent reinfection, any close contacts should be treated at the same time as the infected person even if they don't have any symptoms. Two treatments are usually required, see manufactures instructions.

For further information on Scabies [Click here](#)

[Scabies in care homes](#)

For UKHSA guidance on the management of Scabies cases and outbreaks [Click here](#)