

SCABIES

What is Scabies?

Scabies is a parasitic disease of the skin caused by a mite. A diagnosis is made by recovering the mite from its burrow and identifying it microscopically.

How is it spread?

Scabies is spread by direct skin-to-skin contact. It can also be transferred from clothing, bed linens and furniture of infected persons.

What are the signs and symptoms?

The mite burrows beneath the skin laying its eggs and leaving tracks. Lesions are prominent between fingers, wrists, elbows, the belt line, thighs and external genitalia in men, nipples, abdomen and lower portion of the buttocks in women. In infants the head, neck, palms and soles may be involved. Itching is intense, especially at night. Secondary infections often occur from scratching the skin lesions.

What is the incubation period and how long is it communicable?

The incubation period varies from one to four days for previously infected individuals to as long as two to six weeks for first time infection. It is communicable until the mites and eggs are destroyed by treatment, ordinarily after one or two courses of treatment a week apart.

What should I do about it?

Persons affected should see a physician for diagnosis, take a hot soapy bath or shower, and dry thoroughly with a freshly laundered towel. A thin layer of medicated lotion should be applied to all portions of the skin except the head and neck. Dress in freshly laundered clothing and leave the medication on the skin for 24 hours before washing. A second treatment should usually occur a week later. Because the parasite can reside in clothing and linens, they should be thoroughly washed and dried in clothes dryer. A spray may be obtained for furniture and mattresses.

Children should **NOT** remain in a school/day care center and must be excluded until 24 hrs after the first topical treatment.

CAUTION: Itching may persist for one to two weeks and should **NOT** be regarded as a drug failure or reinfestation. Over treatment is common and should be avoided because of the toxicity of some of the medicated lotions.

For more information, please contact the Santa Rosa County Health Department at 850-983-5200.

