



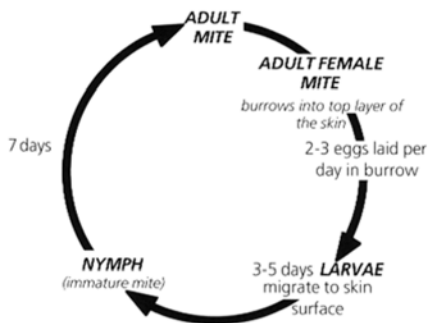
Pharmaceutical
Society of Australia



Scabies

Scabies is a mite infestation in the top layer of skin. This small mite burrows into the skin, where it lives, causing a very itchy skin rash. Scabies is not due to poor hygiene. It is very contagious and can be caught by anyone. A pharmacist can advise on safe and effective treatment.

The scabies life cycle



Scabies mites burrow into the top layer of skin, laying eggs as they go. On top of the skin, small itchy blisters and red patches form. This itchy rash is an allergy reaction to the mites and may take several weeks to develop. The scabies mite can only live on people and is different to animal mites.

Scabies is usually caught by close physical contact with an infested person, but occasionally shared clothing or bedding can spread the mite. Scabies spreads easily between people in the same household and in schools, nursing homes and close knit communities.

Signs and symptoms

- Intense itching all over the body. The itch is often worse when the skin is warm, such as after exercise or a bath or shower. Itching is worse at night and can disturb sleep.
- Red rash – most often seen on the wrists and the sides and webs of the fingers. Other commonly affected areas are the genitals in men and under breasts and on nipples in

women. Young children often have blisters on the soles and palms.

- Burrows can sometimes be seen as small, thread-like grey or white lines on the skin. The lines are raised, wavy and up to 1cm long.

Scabies can infest the whole body, but the rash may show only in some places. Sometimes the only symptom is itch, with no obvious rash.

Treating scabies

The scabies mite can usually be killed with a special insecticide-like lotion or cream. The lotion or cream must be applied over the whole body, from the neck 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. It is usually best to repeat the treatment after one week, to ensure all mites and eggs have been killed. 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 broad paintbrush, cotton wool or a shaving brush
- Start at chin and apply downwards and outwards over the whole body

- Include the soles of the feet, the back, buttocks, 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 and reapply it after washing any area of skin (e.g., hands)
- Do not get cream or lotion in the 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.
- Skin may stay itchy for up to three weeks after treatment. This does not mean that the treatment has not worked. Sometimes this is a side effect of the treatment. Ask a pharmacist for something to help relieve the itch.
- Stop scabies from spreading. Because the itch of scabies can take several weeks to start, people may be infested, but have no symptoms. The infested person and all those who have had close physical contact with the infested person need to be treated. This



Your **Self Care** Pharmacist

includes relatives, carers and friends who visit regularly. Treat any sexual contacts as well. It only takes one person to be left untreated and scabies can return. 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.
- Any bedding, towels, clothing or soft toys that cannot be washed should be stored in tightly sealed plastic bags for 7 days. 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 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 3 weeks after treatment.

Note: If a school age child has scabies, the child should be kept home from school and the school notified. Infected children may return to school after they have had 2 scabies treatments, one week apart.

Related fact cards

- *Eczema and Dermatitis*
- *Head Lice*

For more information

Australasian College of Dermatologists – website www.dermcoll.asn.au/public/a-z_of_skin.asp

DermNet NZ – website www.dermnetnz.org

HEALTH/Insite – website www.healthinsite.gov.au

Consumer Medicine Information (CMI) leaflets – your pharmacist can advise on availability.

NPS Medicines Line – phone 1300 888 763 Monday to Friday, 9am to 6pm EST.

The Poisons Information Centre – in case of poisoning phone 131 126 from anywhere in Australia.

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