

Scabies

Scabies is a skin infection caused by the parasite *Sarcoptes scabiei*. Scabies usually occurs on the hands, armpits, wrists, nipples, waist, abdomen, genitals, and thighs.

Scabies can be treated with lotions or creams.

Causes

Scabies is passed through close person-to-person contact, including sexual contact. Scabies can also spread by sharing items such as bedding or furniture. If you have scabies, you can pass it to others, even if you don't have symptoms.

Symptoms

The most common symptom of scabies is itchiness. The itchiness is often worst at night and after a warm shower. Symptoms are caused by an allergic reaction to the parasite.

Tests and Diagnosis

Scabies treatment is often based on symptoms, such as itchiness and a typical rash. The parasites can also be seen under a microscope from skin scrapings. Contact a health care provider if a new rash is seen 7 to 10 days after the first treatment, or if there are signs of a skin infection.

Treatment

Scabies is treated with lotions or creams that are applied over the body, below the neck. The treatment is left on for at least 8 hours. Itchiness can last for several weeks after treatment. Talk to your health care provider to figure out what treatment is right for you.

Because scabies is passed through close person-to-person contact, people in close contact are often treated at the same time. All clothes and bed sheets need to be washed with hot water (50 degrees Celsius) or dry-cleaned. Anything that cannot be washed in hot water or dry-cleaned should be put in a sealed airtight plastic bag for one week. Mattresses should be vacuumed.

Complications

Scabies don't usually cause any other health problems. Excessive scratching can lead to skin infections. See a health care provider if this happens.

Prevention

It is a good idea to be tested regularly for STIs, especially if you have new sexual partners or open relationships. Talking with partners about safer sex makes sure everyone knows what to expect. Condoms are great if they work for you but they will not stop the spread of scabies.

Resources

HealthLink BC – Information about scabies in multiple languages

<https://www.healthlinkbc.ca/healthlinkbc-files/scabies>

SmartSexResource – If you are worried or have anxiety about scabies

<https://smartsexresource.com/topics/worry-and-anxiety>

TransCareBC – Gender-affirming sexual and reproductive health information

<http://www.phsa.ca/transcarebc/care-support/access-care/sexual-hlth>