



SCABIES

Scabies is caused by a parasitic mite that infests the outer layer of skin in humans. It is spread from person to person by skin-to-skin contact or sharing household items such as towels or a bed. Anyone can get scabies, though it is particularly common in children and the elderly. Most commonly, it is acquired through close skin-to-skin contact, sexual contact, or at hospitals, nursing homes, or hotels. Sometimes infestation can be difficult to prove as the average person typically has only 10-12 mites on the body at any one time, though many more itchy red bumps are often present due to an allergic reaction to the mite. Some people have minimal reaction to the mite and can be infested without having any symptoms. The animal scabies mite carried by dogs cannot live on humans.

Who needs to be treated? – Simultaneous treatment of anyone sharing a bed or having sexual contact is required. Anyone else living in the same household with even mild symptoms should be treated. Sometimes it is prudent to even treat those who are asymptomatic.

Treatment – permethrin (Elimite, Acticin) is the most commonly used medication. It can be used in infants, children, and pregnant woman if needed. It is a cream that is applied to every inch of the body from including the neck down to the toes. Only infants require treatment of the face and scalp. Care should be taken to include areas between fingers and toes, underneath finger and toenails, between the buttocks, around the anus, the skin of the external genitalia, and belly button also. It should be applied at night and washed off in the morning (8-12 hours later). Treatment should be repeated one more time in 7-14 days.

Preventing re-infestation – the initial application of permethrin kills only live mites and not their eggs. The second treatment is meant to kill the newly hatched mites prior to them being able to lay eggs. Itching typically takes 10-14 days to resolve, but may last as long as 2-4 weeks after the last treatment.

Treating your surroundings – at the same time as the skin is treated, it is important to launder bedding, recently worn clothing, and towels. If possible, use hot water and higher heat settings when drying. Items that cannot be washed such as quilts or stuffed animals can be placed in a bag and safely be reused in a week. It is not necessary to fumigate the house. The mite can only live off of the human body for a maximum 3 days and the actual number of mites in most people is very small (10-12). Those with suppressed immune systems due to HIV, transplants or other conditions may require additional therapy.