

Scabies

Scabies is a skin condition caused by a tiny mite that gets under the skin and lays eggs.

It is:

- very common - anyone can get it
- passed by skin-to-skin or sexual contact with a person who has scabies
- easily spread - so it should be treated quickly
- not usually a serious condition - but it does need to be treated correctly

Check if you have scabies

The main symptom of scabies is intense itching, especially at night.

Later, you might also have a raised line on your skin with dots at each end. This is caused by the mites digging under your skin.

After time, it can look like a raised rash or spots. These may look red. They are more difficult to see on brown or black skin, but you should be able to feel them.

The raised line, rash or spots can appear anywhere on your body. But they are common around the hands, wrists, legs, bum, feet, penis or vagina.



Tiny mites lay eggs in the skin. This looks like a raised line with a dot at one end.





The rash spreads and turns into tiny red spots.



The rash may leave dark spots on brown or black skin.

It can take up to 6 weeks after the mites get under your skin for the scabies rash to appear.

It usually spreads across the whole body, but not the head.

You may develop a rash on your head and neck if you:

- are an older person
- are a very young child
- have a weakened immune system

Treatment for scabies

Your pharmacist can help with scabies.

They will recommend a cream or lotion. You can buy this without a prescription. You'll need to repeat the treatment 1 week later.

You usually apply the cream or lotion from your ears downwards. But children and the elderly can apply it over their whole body. Read the instructions carefully that come with the cream or lotion. Ask your pharmacist if you are unsure.

It's important that you also:

- follow advice on washing bedding and clothing to prevent the mites coming back
- stay at home for 24 hours after the first treatment has been applied. Do not have visitors. Avoid direct skin-to skin contact with others

Household and sexual contacts

Everyone in your house that you have close contact with needs to be treated at the same time - even if they do not have symptoms.

If you have had sexual contact with anyone in the past 6 weeks, they should also be treated.

Your household and sexual contacts will also need to repeat the treatment after 1 week.

They should also follow the same advice for washing their bedding and clothes, even if they do not have any symptoms

Help with itchiness

Calamine lotion, [emollients](#) or [antihistamines](#) may help to relieve itchy skin. Some of these are available without a prescription.

If you are very itchy, your GP can prescribe creams that help with itchiness.

[Itchy skin](#)

How long it takes to get rid of scabies

You or your child can go back to work or school 24 hours after the first treatment.

Although the treatment kills the mites quickly, the itching can carry on for up to 4 weeks afterwards.

Contact your GP if:

- your skin is red, sore or hot - these may be signs of a skin infection
- you feel unwell
- your rash is crusted or flaky
- your skin is still itching 4 weeks after treatment has finished

How to stop scabies spreading

Anyone can get scabies. It has nothing to do with poor hygiene. You cannot get scabies from pets.

People who live or work closely together in nurseries or nursing homes are more at risk.

Do

- ✓ wash all bedding and clothing on the first day of treatment - 50 degrees Celsius will kill the mites
- ✓ tumble dry bedding, towels and clothing at 50 degrees Celsius for at least 30 minutes if you cannot wash them
- ✓ put clothing that cannot be washed in a sealed bag for 4 days until the mites die - this may include shoes, hats, soft toys and removeable child car seat or buggy covers
- ✓ vacuum any sofa or mattresses your skin has been in direct contact with for a long time
- ✓ stop babies and children sucking treatment from their hands by putting socks or mittens on them

Don't

- ✗ do not have sex or close physical contact with anyone until you have finished the full course of treatment
- ✗ do not share bedding, clothing or towels with someone who has scabies

Complications of scabies

Scratching the rash can cause skin infections such as [impetigo](#).

Scabies can make conditions such as [eczema](#) or [psoriasis](#) worse.

If there are a lot of mites under the skin, crusted scabies can form. This is serious, but not common. It can affect older people and those with a lowered immune system.

Page last reviewed: 26 September 2024

Next review due: 26 September 2027

This project has received funding from the Government of Ireland's Sláintecare Integration Fund 2019 under Grant Agreement Number 123.

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