

SCABIES

What is scabies?

Scabies are little mites (bug) that burrow in the skin and cause intense itching and little red bumps. They are so small that they can only be seen with a microscope. They rarely attack the skin above the neck except in small infants. Scabies is contagious and is transmitted by close personal contact.

Clues to scabies are small curvy lines in the skin (often on the wrists and heels) that are caused by the mite burrowing in the skin.

These can be seen using a special tool in the office called a dermatoscope. There are usually only about 3-5 live mites on the skin. The itchy red bumps are caused by the body's immune reaction to the scabies mite.



What is the treatment of scabies?

Most people with scabies will be treated with anti-scabies medication, such as 5% permethrin lotion. The lotion should be applied in a thin layer to every bit of the skin from the neck down, even over areas that do not seem to be affected. Make sure to treat the skin between the fingers and toes and clean vigorously under the fingernails with the lotion. If there are spots on the face, this area should be treated carefully with the lotion, avoiding the eyes. The lotion should be left on overnight. In the morning the child should be given a bath. Do not bath or shower before putting on the lotion, since this may increase absorption of the medication into the body. The treatment should be repeated again in seven days, and these two treatments almost always bring a cure. The itching and rash, can last for up to two months after treatment even though the mites are killed and gone. All medicine should be stored out the reach of children since it is poisonous if swallowed.

What else should be done ?

All washable clothing, towels and bed linens that have been in contact with the infested persons should be machine laundered in hot water and machine dried on high heat for 20 minutes to destroy the mites. If there are items such as stuffed animals and quilts that are too difficult to wash, they can be placed in a large plastic bag, sealed and stored unopened for a week.

Scabies are easily passed from one person to another and usually more than one person in a family has them, even if they have not yet developed a rash. All household members (including baby-sitters) should be treated. Children can return to school after one treatment with the anti-scabies medication.