



Scabies

Scabies is an infestation caused by tiny mites that burrow and lay eggs under the skin. If scabies has been reported in the childcare or school setting, parents/guardians should check their child for a rash.

School health and childcare provider information

Cause

Sarcoptes scabiei, a tiny mite.

Symptoms

Rash consisting of pink bumps or tiny blisters and intense itching, which may be more severe at night. Frequently only scratch marks can be seen. Common locations to see the rash are folds of skin between fingers, around wrists and elbows, and armpits. Other areas where rash may appear are knees, waist, thighs, genital area, abdomen, chest, breasts, and lower portion of buttocks. Infants and young children may be infested on the head, neck, palms, and soles of feet.

In some instances, the burrows can be seen. They appear as thin, gray or white, lines in the skin.

Spread

Spread by frequent or prolonged direct contact with the skin of a person with scabies (also during sexual contact) or by sharing bedding, towels, or underclothing of a person with scabies.

Mites cannot survive off the human body for more than 3 days and cannot reproduce off the body.

Incubation

It takes 2 to 6 weeks from the time a person is exposed until symptoms appear. Symptoms may appear in 1 to 4 days if the person has had scabies before.

Contagious period

From the time a person acquires the mites (before rash appears) until 24 hours after treatment begins.

Exclusion

Childcare and school

Until 24 hours after treatment begins.

Scabies

Diagnosis

Recommend parents/guardians call their health care provider if they suspect scabies in their household members. Skin scrapings should be examined to identify the mites.

Treatment

A health care provider will prescribe a medication, usually a cream or lotion. Permethrin 5% (Elimite*) is the drug of choice, but there are several other prescription scabicides. Directions must be followed carefully.

Treatment is typically recommended for those with high-risk exposures such as household members to be treated at the same time as the person with scabies, even if no signs or symptoms are present. Other people to consider for treatment are babysitter/nannies, significant others, and non-custodial parents. This will help prevent reinfestation.

* Brand names are mentioned for identification purposes only and do not constitute health department endorsement.

Itching and rash may not go away immediately after treatment. It often takes 2 to 3 weeks for rash and itching to go away.

Prevention

- Wash bedding and towels used in the past 3 days in hot water and dry in a hot dryer at the time of treatment. Items that cannot be laundered should be sealed in a bag for at least 4 days.
- Vacuum upholstered furniture and carpeting. Do not use insecticide sprays.

For more information, call Hennepin County HSPHD-Epidemiology at (612) 543-5230 or call your local health department.

Hennepin County Public Health
Epidemiology
612-543-5230
epi-envhlth@hennepin.us

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