

# Scabies

Scabies is caused by mites, which are very tiny insect-like organisms that can live only in the skin of people. They are hardly visible without a microscope. Mites burrow under the skin and lay their eggs, causing a rash that is very itchy and red.

## What are the symptoms of scabies?

A rash that is very itchy and red. Itchiness is usually worse at night. The rash usually appears between the fingers, in the groin area, between the toes, or around the wrists or elbows, but it may be found anywhere on the body. In children under 2 years of age, the rash may appear on the head, face, neck, chest, and abdomen and back as white, curvy, thread-like lines, tiny red bumps or scratch marks.

## How is scabies spread?

Scabies is spread by prolonged, close and intimate contact. Mites cannot live away from human skin for more than 3 days. Mites on clothing die immediately when the clothing is washed in hot water and dried in a hot dryer.

The mites die if clothing does not touch a person for more than 4 days or until mites are destroyed by treatment.

## How is scabies treated?

Once a doctor has made a diagnosis, scabies is treated with a prescription medication applied as a lotion or cream to the skin. It is very important that household contacts also be treated, even though they may be asymptomatic.

## More to know

- Scabies is a common condition in children and is easy to treat, but it is often confused with other skin conditions.
- Itchiness may continue for a few weeks after treatment even if no scabies is present.
- Children with scabies can return to school or daycare the day after the initial treatment has been applied.
- Items that cannot be washed can be stored in an airtight plastic bag for 1 week to kill the mites.
- To prevent recurrence, all members of a child's household may be treated at once, and all clothes and bedding washed at the same time.



**Northwestern  
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