

IDRS Infectious Disease Reporting System

Disease Reporting 24 Hours a Day

Columbus Public Health and Franklin County Public Health

SCABIES

Scabies is an infestation of the skin with the microscopic mite *Sarcoptes scabiei*. The mite burrows into the top layer of the skin where it feeds and lays eggs, producing pimple-like irritations or linear burrows and intense itching. Infestation is common, found worldwide, and affects people of all races and social classes.

Symptoms

- The most prominent symptom of scabies is intense itching, particularly at night.
- A patchy, red, pimple-like rash appears, which may have tiny blisters and scales. If you closely, you may see tiny burrows from the mites that look like raised and crooked grayish-white lines on the skin surface.
- Scabies mites like to hide between fingers; around wrists, elbows and armpits, waist, genitals, nipples, and lower buttocks. Children under age 2 usually have the rash on the head, neck, palms, and soles.
- Symptoms will usually appear 2 to 6 weeks after exposure in people who have never had scabies. People who have had scabies before show symptoms within 1 to 4 days after re-exposure.
- Crusted (also called Norwegian) scabies is a severe form of scabies that can occur in some persons who have a weak immune system or are elderly, disabled, or debilitated. Persons with crusted scabies have thick crusts of skin that contain large numbers of scabies mites and eggs.

Transmission

- Scabies mites are transferred by direct skin-to-skin contact. Because the mites do not survive very long away from the human body, indirect transfer through clothing or bedding can occur only if these items have been in contact with an infested person immediately before handling of these items. Scabies can also be transmitted during sexual contact.
- A person is able to spread scabies until mites and eggs are killed by treatment. The mites are present and can spread to another individual long before the infected person shows symptoms. Individuals with scabies should not attend school, child care or work until 24 hours after the treatment is initiated.
- Outbreaks are occasionally seen in health care facilities, institutions and child care centers.
- Animals get a different type of scabies and cannot spread it to humans.

Treatment

- Scabies can be diagnosed by the appearance of the rash, or by analyzing skin scrapings.
- Skin lotions containing are available by prescription. The lotion is applied to the whole body except the head and neck and left on for 8 to 12 hours, after which it is thoroughly washed off. Most treatments should be repeated in 7 to 10 days to kill any remaining mites. Sometimes itching can persist for 1 to 2 weeks after treatment, even if the medicine is working.
- Clothing and bedding should be washed in hot water or dry cleaned at the same time as the person is treated. Items you can't wash may also be sealed in plastic bags for 7 to 10 days to kill the mites.
- It is not necessary to spray, fumigate or otherwise chemically treat the home or building for scabies.

Prevention

- Avoid physical contact with infested individuals and their belongings, specifically clothing and bedding.
- Wear rubber, latex or plastic gloves when touching infested people and their clothing and bedding. If you cannot wear gloves, wash exposed skin, especially hands and arms, immediately after contact.

All information is general in nature and is not intended to be used as a substitute for appropriate professional advice.



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