

Scabies

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What is scabies?

Scabies is caused by a tiny mite which can live on the skin. The mite burrows into the outer layer of the skin to lay its eggs. As the eggs hatch and grow into mites, they cause an allergic reaction in the skin, often accompanied by intense itching.

Crusted (Norwegian) Scabies occurs very occasionally and is found mainly in the elderly and people with immune system problems. The number of mites is much higher and causes thickening and crusting of the skin.

How is it spread?

Scabies is passed on by fairly prolonged, direct skin contact with an affected person, for example between couples or parents and their children. It is not spread by towels, bedding or clothing.

In crusted scabies cases, transmission by contact is easier and quicker because of the large number of mites present in the skin. Crusted scabies can also be transmitted via bedding, towels and clothing.

What are the symptoms?

The mites' burrows can often be seen as thin light brown or silvery wavy lines often on the wrists, elbows, between the fingers, or genital areas.

Widespread and intense itching occurs, particularly at night.

A rash of pinkish-red or small white-headed spots appears, commonly on the arms, inner thigh, buttocks and genitals. In infants and children, the face, scalp, palms and soles of the feet may also be affected.

In the early stages, an affected person may not show any symptoms of infection.

What will happen to me now?

Scabies is treated with a lotion that needs to be applied all over your body. This usually consists of two treatments, seven days apart. All people in close contact with you (e.g. family and household members, sexual partners) may require treatment at the same time to prevent re-infection occurring, even if they don't have symptoms.

If you are admitted to hospital, you will need to be nursed in a single room and staff will wear gloves and aprons when giving personal care until you have had your first course of treatment (24 hours).

You may find that itching continues, even after successful treatment. If after several days the itch is still present and not lessening, tell your doctor.

Following completion of each treatment, have a wash, bath or shower to remove the cream and change bedding.

Further information

If you have any queries that we have not answered in this leaflet, please ask your nurse or doctor caring for you on the ward or contact one of the Infection Control nurses.

For Eastern services, call 01392 402355

For Northern services, call 01271 322680

PALS

The Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) ensures that the NHS listens to patients, relatives, carers and friends, answers questions and resolves concerns as quickly as possible. If you have a query or concern, please contact:

PALS Mid Devon, East Devon and Exeter

- call 01392 402093 or email rduh.pals-eastern@nhs.net. You can also visit the PALS and Information Centre in person at the Royal Devon and Exeter Hospital in Wonford, Exeter.

PALS North Devon

- call 01271 314090 or email rduh.pals-northern@nhs.net. You can also visit the PALS and Information Centre in person at the North Devon District Hospital in Barnstaple.

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