

Scabies and other mites causing skin disease

Scabies is an infestation of the skin by tiny, insect-like creatures called mites. Scabies affects people of all ages, sexes, races and standards of personal hygiene. Having scabies does not mean that people are unclean. Scabies is specific to humans. Animals can get mite infections that look the same, but they do not cause disease in humans.

The tiny mites burrow under the skin, and itchy red bumps or blisters appear, especially on skin folds around the fingers, toes, wrists, elbows, armpits, waistline, thighs, genitals, stomach and bottom. Children under 2 years are likely to be infected on the head, neck, palms and soles of the feet, but they can have mites all over their body.

People with scabies usually have itchy skin. Scratching can break the skin, allowing germs to enter and cause other dangerous infections on top of the scabies (for example, acute rheumatic fever).

How it spreads

Scabies usually spreads by prolonged skin-to-skin contact with an infected person – a quick handshake or hug will usually not spread the disease. Mites can sometimes spread on clothes or bedding that has been freshly contaminated by an infected person, but the mites can only live away from the body for 2 to 3 days.

Exclusion period

Exclude until the day after starting treatment.

Actions for educators and other staff

Follow the exclusion period in the *Staying healthy* guidelines.

Ensure staff and children have good hand hygiene.

Ensure staff use appropriate cleaning practices, as described in the *Staying healthy* guidelines. Bed linen that has been used by children with untreated mites should be washed in hot water and detergent. Put items that cannot be washed or dry-cleaned (such as toys, cushions and pillows) out in the sun for 2 or 3 hours to kill the mites. Alternatively, items can be disinfected by storing them in a closed plastic bag for at least 72 hours.

Actions for parents and carers

Keep your child at home until the day after they have started treatment.

Treat all people in the household and anyone else who has skin-to-skin contact with your child, even if they have no itching or other symptoms.

Make sure your child washes their hands thoroughly and often.

Wash bedding or clothes used by people with the mites in hot water and detergent. These things are contaminated if the person used them in the 48 hours before treatment starts. Put items that cannot be washed or dry-cleaned (such as toys, cushions and pillows) out in the sun for 2 or 3 hours to kill the mites.

More information about scabies

See healthdirect for more information on prevention, diagnosis and treatment of scabies (healthdirect.gov.au/scabies).

To find out if a child needs medical help:

- use the online symptom checker (healthdirect.gov.au/symptom-checker)
- speak to a registered nurse by calling the 24-hour health advice hotline on 1800 022 222.