

Scabies

Fact Sheet

What is Scabies?

Scabies is a skin disease caused by the mites – *Sarcoptes scabiei*. Adult females burrow into the top layer of dead skin of the body, laying 2-3 eggs per day. The eggs hatch within 2 to 4 days, become adults by 10 days and live for approximately 30 days. However, the mites cannot survive very long off the human body, only 1 to 2 days. The burrowing mites leave a linear zigzag looking itchy rash, which develops within 2 to 6 weeks after infestation and can be more intense at night. The rash is mostly found between the toes, fingers, wrists, elbows, knees, armpits, under the breast, in the groin and other warm moist areas of the body. Itching can last for up to 2 to 3 weeks after treatment.

Norwegian scabies is a highly contagious and more severe form of scabies that most commonly occurs in people with low immunity or debilitated patients. It often appears as a generalised dermatitis more widely distributed than the burrows, with extensive scaling of the skin and sometimes blistering and crusting. The usual severe itching may be reduced or absent. Norwegian scabies is highly infectious even through casual contact because of the large number of mites in the exfoliating skin. Diagnosis should only be made by a doctor, who may perform a skin-scraping test to see the mites under a microscope. Scabies is easily treated with a medicated cream or lotion, which is applied at night (for 8 – 12 hours) to the entire body before being washed off. The medication should be reapplied if it rubs off during the night to ensure the cream or lotion is effective. A repeat treatment is often required after 7 days.

Can I get Scabies again?

Yes. There is no immunity to scabies. With re-infestation the symptoms of itching and rash occur much sooner, probably within a few days. The person will be very sensitive to the mites,

although there may not be as many mites and less rash. The rash and itching may appear within 1-4 days. Do not self-diagnose or treat yourself. It is very important to see your doctor for confirmation of the scabies again.

Who is at risk from Scabie infection?

Scabies is easily spread when there is close contact of people, especially the elderly from nursing homes and children during play activities.

How can Scabies be spread?

Scabies can spread through contact with the mites, which are carried in the skin cells of the body. This may be either directly (by touching the skin) or indirectly (by touching something that has been used by the infected person, e.g., clothing, towels and bedding).

How will my care change whilst in hospital?

- Scabies is considered infectious until you have completed at least the first application of the medicated cream or lotion i.e., 24 hours. However, depending on the severity of the scabies you may be considered infectious until you have completed the second application of the medicated cream or lotion i.e., 7 days. During this time, you will be managed using special infection control precautions.
- Regular and thorough hand hygiene is one of the most successful ways to prevent the spread of **ALL** infections.
- A sign is placed outside your door to alert hospital staff for the need to use special protective infection control precautions. This sign also alerts visitors of the need to speak with nursing staff prior to entering your room.
- The hospital staff will wear protective apparel such as gloves and a long-sleeved gown when they enter your room. These items are disposed of in a separate waste bin as the staff member leaves your room.

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- You will be allocated a private room with your own en-suite facilities. We ask that your movement throughout the ward is limited to essential movement only, such as physiotherapy.

Good Hand Hygiene Practices

Hand Hygiene is the most effective way to prevent **ALL** infections, including the flu and the common cold. Encourage your family and friends to learn and maintain good hand hygiene practices every day. Please refer to the hand hygiene information in the patient information booklet or hand hygiene leaflet available from the Infection prevention and control team.

During your stay in hospital, you may have seen the staff using an alcohol-based hand rub, as an alternative to soap and water. Alcohol-based hand rubs or gels can be used for hand hygiene as long as your hands are not visibly soiled / dirty. There are a variety of brands on the market and are available for purchase at most pharmacies. You may choose to use this type of product at home.

Can I still have visitors?

Yes – The nursing staff will educate your visitors on the need to perform hand hygiene before entering your room and when they leave your room. We would appreciate it if you would also encourage your visitors to perform this hand hygiene, as this is the most effective way to prevent any infestation. Your visitors will also be asked to wear gloves, apron or gowns to protect themselves from infestation. The nursing staff will direct your visitors in applying these items.

Please note: Family members or close contacts may need to be assessed and treated by a doctor; however, treatment will not prevent a person from getting scabies.

What happens when I go home?

- When you return home, it is important for you, your family and your friends to continue the good hand hygiene practices that you have been taught in hospital every day.
- All clothes, bedding, towels and linen should be washed using hot water, hot clothes drier or dry-cleaned.
- Clean or vacuum the bathroom and bedroom floors and soft furnishings.
- There are no special precautions for crockery and cutlery.
- It is important that anyone assisting you with close personal care wears gloves if they are going to be in contact with your skin, wounds, blood, urine, or faeces. They must wash their hands well, after removing their gloves and disposing of the gloves immediately in the rubbish bin.

Where can I get further information?

Talk to your doctor or the nurses caring for you. If you wish to speak with the Infection Control department, ask your nurse to contact us. Our office hours are 8am to 4pm Monday to Friday. Our contact numbers are:

- Office: (02) 9480 9433
- Office: (02) 9480 9732

Alternatively contact your Local Public Health Unit 1300 066 055.

References

NSW Dept of Health; Infection Prevention and Control Policy PD2017_013

National Health and Medical Research Council; Australian Guidelines for the Prevention and Control of Infection in Healthcare (2019)

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC); Infectious Diseases Factsheets – Parasites – Scabies (November 2, 2010)

NSW Dept of Health; Environmental Health, Human Parasites – Scabies Factsheets (17 March 2021)