

Scabies

What Is Scabies?

Scabies (say: SKAY-beez) is an itchy skin condition caused by teeny, tiny mites that dig tunnels underneath the [skin's](#) surface. Mites are part of the arachnid family, the same family that includes spiders and ticks. Scabies mites have eight legs and a round body and are pretty hard to see. When they're fully grown, each mite is no bigger than the size of the point of a pin.

When you get scabies mites, the female mites dig under the top layer of your skin. There they lay eggs and die after about a month. The eggs hatch, and the new mites grow up and come to the skin's surface. The females mate with the males, then the males die and the females dig back under the skin to lay new eggs. This life cycle takes only 2 to 3 weeks.

Anyone can get scabies — little babies, adults, kids like you. The mites aren't picky. They don't care if you're clean, dirty, rich, or poor. All they want is to live on or in the skin of a human being, and any human being will do.

Mites are more common in places where there are lots of people, like college dorms, camps, classrooms, and childcare centers. In crowded places like these, people are often in close contact with each other. When people get close enough, mites move from skin to skin. That's how you can get scabies — from someone who already has them.

Sometimes the mites may move onto a person from a towel, clothing, or sheets recently used by someone who has scabies, but this is not common. (Doctors believe mites live about 2 to 3 days when they are not on a human body.)

What Are the Symptoms?

Mites are nothing to be scared of, but these little creatures certainly can be irritating. After they make your skin their home, your body may react to them with a dry, itchy, bumpy, reddish rash.

Sometimes, a person with scabies also might see thin, slightly raised light lines on the skin where the mites have been digging. These usually appear in places with skin folds, such as between the fingers and toes, on the wrists, behind the knees, under the arms, or around the groin or rear end. When you have scabies you may have lots of itching at night and sores from scratching, too.

It takes about 4 to 6 weeks for the rash to show up. If you've had scabies before, your body will recognize the mites more quickly and you'll probably see the bumpy rash in just a few days.

What Will the Doctor Do?

If you notice a new rash on your skin, tell your parent. You may take a trip [to the doctor](#) to have it checked out.

After looking closely at the rash and where it is on your skin, the doctor may tell you that you have scabies. To be sure, many doctors will try to find a mite by gently scraping one of the places where the mites have been digging and looking at the scraping under a microscope. Remember: mites dig under just the first layer of skin so this scraping doesn't hurt.

It isn't always easy for a doctor to find a mite, but you can help out by not scratching the itchy bumps before you visit the doctor. That way, you won't scratch the mite out of your skin.

You can also help in your treatment. If you have scabies, your doctor will probably give you a cream to spread on your body (any place below your neck) that will kill the mites. Many of these creams are left on overnight and washed off the next morning in the shower.

After you rub on the cream don't wash your hands. The skin between fingers is one of mites' favorite places, and you want to make sure the cream is there, too. If you leave any spaces uncovered, the mites will go there and start all over. To help with the itching, the doctor may suggest certain medicines your parent can get at the drugstore.

Itching from scabies can last for several weeks after the treatment, even though all the mites have been killed. This is totally normal and does not mean the treatment didn't work. And remember your doctor can give you a medicine to help with the itching.

Putting a Stop to Scabies

As you're getting rid of your scabies, you'll want to make sure they don't spread to other people. The doctor will probably treat everyone else in the room with the scabies medicine, just in case. To kill all other mites, you will use hot(50° C), soapy water to wash all clothing, towels, or sheets used by anyone who has scabies. Then the laundry should be dried on high heat. **(Please hand wash, do not use the washing machine, in order to avoid infection)**

Other personal items (like stuffed or pillows) in airtight plastic bags for at least 14 days. Avoid crowded space, enhance personal hygiene, bathe often and change clothes.

With these simple steps, you can stop scabies!

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Date reviewed: June 2014