

Kent County Health Department  
**Scabies Fact Sheet**



What is scabies?

Scabies is a contagious skin disease, caused by infestation with mites. Only one type of mite is transmitted from human to human. These mites cannot survive off the human body for more than 48 hours and cannot reproduce off the body.

How do you get scabies?

Scabies is spread by prolonged direct contact with skin or through shared bedding, towels, and clothing of an infested person. This kind of contact may occur in household or day care settings. Infestation occurs when female mites burrow under the skin and lay small numbers of eggs each day for several weeks.

Will human scabies mites live on pets?

No. This type of scabies mite can only live and reproduce on humans.

Can scabies mites hop, jump, or fly?

No. These mites can only crawl. They crawl about one inch per minute on the skin surface.

What are the symptoms of scabies?

Itching is the most noticeable symptom and is usually more severe at night. There is usually a skin rash consisting of red, itchy bumps. The itching and rash are believed to be “allergic” reactions to the mites and may take place away from the burrows themselves.

The most common sites for the rash are the folds of skin between the fingers and toes,

or around the wrists, elbows, knees, armpits or stomach.

How soon do symptoms occur?

People who have never had scabies before usually notice symptoms about four to six weeks after contact with a person infected with scabies. People who have had scabies before develop symptoms sooner, often within a few days to one week. You do not become immune to scabies.

How is scabies treated?

The doctor will recommend medication to be applied to the skin from the neck down to and including the bottoms of the feet. All instructions must be followed exactly and medication should never be applied more often than directed. When one member of the family has scabies, it is important that all members be treated at the same time because they may have mites but not yet developed symptoms.

Do I need to keep my child home from school?

Children should be kept home from school until treatment has been started.

How long is an infected person infectious to others?

You can get scabies from another person as long as the mite is still present on the person who is currently infested.

How soon after treatment will I feel better?

Itching may continue for two to three weeks. This does not mean you are still infested. Your health care provider may prescribe more medication to relieve itching

## Scabies Fact Sheet – page 2

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if it is severe. No new burrows or rashes should appear 24-48 hours after effective treatment.

How can scabies be prevented?

People with symptoms should be checked and treated by their doctor as soon as possible. People living in the same house and having contact with someone who has scabies should be treated at the same time as the infested person to prevent scabies from developing. If you wait until symptoms develop, mites may already be transferred to other people.

To eliminate scabies mites from the home:

- Mop floors
- Vacuum carpets and upholstered furniture
- Wipe off other furniture with a general cleaning agent or an oiled dust cloth
- Pesticide sprays are not necessary or recommended for control of mites in the home

To eliminate mites from clothing, towels or bedding:

- Wash with hot water and soap and dry using the hot dryer cycle
- Dry clean
- Seal in a plastic bag for seven days, or expose to freezing temperatures for about 12 hours (outdoors during winter)

Some points to remember:

- Anyone can get scabies. It is not a sign of poor hygiene or being dirty.
- The symptoms of scabies may not develop for four to six weeks after infestation with the mite; however, the mites may spread to other persons during this period, as well as

after symptoms develop.

- Early diagnosis and treatment of cases prevents spread to other people. If symptoms appear, see a doctor as soon as possible.

**The Health Department does not diagnosis scabies.**

*This fact sheet is for information only and is not meant to be used for self-diagnosis or as a substitute for talking with a health care provider. If you have any questions about scabies or think you may have it, call your health care provider.*