



What is scabies?

Scabies is a common infestation, which is caused by tiny mites that live under the skin. The mites cannot survive off the human body for more than 48-72 hours.

Who gets scabies?

Anyone can get scabies despite socioeconomic status, good health habits and good hygiene. Scabies is easily spread to household contacts.

How is scabies spread?

Scabies is spread by direct skin-to-skin contact with a person already infested with scabies. In rare cases, a person could get scabies by sharing clothing, towels or bedding of an infected person.

What are the symptoms of scabies?

People with scabies have intense itching, especially at night. The areas of the skin that are most affected with pimple-like irritations and itching include the webs of the fingers, wrists, armpits, waist, groin, shoulder blades, thighs and skin folds. Sometimes people will develop sores on their body caused by scratching.

How soon do symptoms appear?

Symptoms may begin after 4-6 weeks. A person that has had scabies in the past may develop symptoms within several days.

When and for how long is a person able to spread scabies?

When living on a person, the adult female mite can live up to a month. A person is able to spread scabies until mites and eggs are destroyed by treatment.

What is the treatment for scabies?

Lotions can be prescribed by a health care provider to treat scabies. Follow directions provided by the health care provider or on the package insert. Apply lotion to a clean body from the neck down (not on the face or scalp) and leave on overnight (8 hours). Shower to wash off the lotion after 8 hours and put on clean clothes. Wash all bedding, clothes and towels used by infected persons in hot water and then use a hot clothes dryer. A second treatment 7-10 days later may be needed. Pregnant women and children are treated with a milder medication.

What can be done to prevent scabies?

Avoid direct skin-to-skin contact or contact with the belongings of those that have scabies. Those that may have been exposed (close extended contacts) should seek medical care for possible treatment.

**For more information, please contact
Boston Public Health Commission
Communicable Disease Control
(617) 534-5611 or www.bphc.org**