



Scabies

(SCAY– bees)

What is scabies?

Scabies is an infestation of the skin by the human itch mite (*Sarcoptes scabiei* var *hominis*). The microscopic scabies mite burrows into the upper layer of the skin where it lives and lays its eggs

What are the symptoms of scabies?

The most common signs and symptoms of scabies are intense itching, especially at night, and a pimple-like (papular) itchy rash. The itching and rash each may affect much of the body or be limited to a few common sites. The rash also can include tiny blisters (vesicles) and scales. Scratching the rash can cause skin sores; sometimes these sores become infected by bacteria.

How long does it take for symptoms to show?

For people who have never had scabies before, symptoms usually start between 4 and 6 weeks after coming in contact with an infested person and between 1 to 4 days for a person who has had scabies before. It is important to remember that an infested person can spread scabies during this time, even if he/she does not have symptoms yet.

Where do scabies rash or lesions appear?

Common places for the rash to occur are the wrist, elbow, armpit, webbing between the fingers, nipple, penis, waist, belt-line, and buttocks. For infants, lesions may appear on the head, neck, palms and soles of the feet. Lice found on the head are head lice, not scabies. Animals cannot get or spread scabies.

How can a person get scabies?

A person can get scabies from prolonged direct skin-to-skin contact and can also get scabies during sexual contact. Sometimes a person can get scabies from sharing clothing, towels, or bedding but only if the infested person had recently used the items.

Who can get scabies?

Anyone can get scabies. Scabies is found worldwide and affects people of all races and social classes. Scabies can spread rapidly under crowded conditions where close body and skin contact is frequent. Institutions such as nursing homes, extended-care facilities, and prisons are often sites of scabies outbreaks. Child care facilities also are a common site of scabies infestations.

How long can scabies mites live?

On a person, scabies mites can live for as long as 1-2 months. Off a person, scabies mites usually do not survive more than 48-72 hours. Scabies mites will die if exposed to a temperature of 50°C (122°F) for 10 minutes so it is important to wash all infested clothing or bedding in very hot water.

How can I find out if I have scabies?

A health care provide will need to examine or test a sample of the infested area of skin.

Can scabies be treated?

Yes, your health care provided can give you special lotions or creams can get rid of scabies. It is important that these creams are applied to your entire body to ensure that the infested areas are being treated. Antihistamines, topical corticosteroids or other itch creams can also be used to address the symptoms caused by the mites.

Should additional precautionary measures should be taken?

Yes, scabies is very contagious through skin-to-skin contact. It is important that:

- All members of your household and any sexual partners should also be treated the same time to prevent re-infestation.
- All bedding and clothing worn during the 3 days before starting treatment should be cleaned in a washer with very hot water and dried using a hot air.
- Children stay home from child care or school until treatment is complete.

It is important to remember that mites cannot survive more than 3 days without skin contact.

How long can an infected person spread scabies?

Scabies can be spread from the time that someone is infected with the adult mites until the infected person is treated for scabies. If you are sexually active, it is important that your partner is treated so that the infestation is not past from one partner to another. People who had scabies before are still able to be re-infested.

Where can I get tested?

Most health care providers can test and treat for scabies along with other STIs. To find a health care center in a neighborhood near you, call the Mayor's Health Line at **617-534-5050** and **Toll-Free: 1-800-847-0710** or visit <http://www.hivtest.org/STDTesting.aspx> and enter your zip code

How can you protect yourself from getting scabies and other STIs?

The only 100% effective way to prevent scabies is to not have sex.

If you do have sex, you can limit your risk by taking the following steps:

- Always use a latex or polyurethane condom or barrier (dental dam) when having anal, vaginal and/or oral sex
 - Condoms made from "natural" materials may protect against pregnancy but NOT STIs
- Reduce your number of partners if you choose to have sex
- Talk with your partner about their STI status and getting tested
- Talk with your health care provider about sex safety and getting tested
- Understand that having sex while under the influence of drugs and/or alcohol can increase the likelihood of unprotected sex
- Contact your health care provider if you experience any symptoms



**For more information contact
Boston Public Health Commission
Infectious Disease Bureau
617-534-5611 or www.bphc.org**