

Scabies

Scabies is a highly contagious skin condition caused by a tiny insect or mite called *sarcoptes scabiei var hominis*. The most common symptom of scabies is itching, which may be worse at night or after a hot bath. The mite that causes scabies digs deep into the skin and causes a rash. This rash looks like curvy threads, tiny red bumps or scratches. The most common areas affected are the webs of skin between the fingers, the inner part of the wrists, folds of the arms and groin region. In younger children and infants, almost any area of the skin may be involved, especially the palms and soles. Scabies is passed either from person to person by direct contact with infested persons or from items that have recently been in contact with an infested person. The mites can live on clothes, or other objects off skin for up to four days. Treatment consists of the following two steps:

1. Treating the infection

- Everyone in the house should be treated for scabies at the same time whether they have symptoms or not.
- Scabies is treated with a medicated cream or scabicide prescribed by your doctor. The more commonly used ones contain 5% permethrin. This medication however is not recommended in very young infants or in pregnant women. Please note that head lice medications are ineffective in treating scabies.
- The prescribed treatment is applied before bed. Bathe only the following morning.
- The cream must be applied to the whole body, with particular attention being paid to the skin folds, fingernails, toenails, behind the ears and the groin.
- The mite is found in all areas, even those without signs; therefore, the face and scalp must also be treated, particularly in young infants and children.
- Wash the cream off with soap and water 8-12 hours after putting it on.
- The medicated cream could make the skin dry and aggravate the itching.
- The day after treatment, you can use a moisturizing crème or lotion without alcohol or perfume in it, to ease the itching.
- Oral antihistamines such as Benadryl, may also ease the itching and help children sleep if given at night before bedtime.
- Your doctor may prescribe a mild cortisone cream, if itching is severe.
- Keep your child's fingernails short to diminish the effects of scratching.
- Put mittens or socks on your child's hands before they go to bed, especially if they suck their thumb.
- After treatment a person is still contagious for 2-4 hours.
- Itching may continue for several weeks even after adequate treatment.

2. Cleaning the environment

- All bed linen (sheets, pillow cases, blankets) and clothing worn next to the skin (underwear, t-shirts, socks, pants) should be laundered in a hot cycle wash and dried for at least 20 minutes in a hot drying cycle.
- For items that are not washable or if hot water is not available, place all linen, clothing and stuffed animals into plastic bags and store away from the family for five to seven days. The mite does not survive beyond four days without skin contact.
- Vacuum the floor and furniture. Do not use fumigant sprays; they may be toxic.

Miscellaneous information

- One treatment will usually get rid of the scabies although itching may persist for several weeks.
- Encourage your child to practice good hygiene including not sharing clothing with friends.
- Secondary bacterial infection of the scabies lesions can occur as a result of scratching and invasion by skin bacteria. Please see your doctor if pain, fever red streaks or lines, pus or swelling occurs.

(Sources: Montreal Children's Hospital, Children's Care Clinic)

Important

The information contained herein, is intended as a guideline and is for educational purposes only. If at anytime you are concerned about the well-being of your child, you should seek a medical opinion either at our office, or at the emergency room of your nearest hospital or the Montreal Children's Hospital.