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Scabies

Scabies is a skin condition caused by a mite, a creature so small that it can be seen only under a microscope. The female mite burrows into the skin and lays microscopic eggs. The path along which the mite burrows can sometimes be seen, and looks like a tiny scratch mark.

Those affected develop a rash with intense itching, often worse at night. If the skin is scratched open, a bacterial infection can also develop. The symptoms of itching can take as long as 35 days to develop, especially after the first exposure. Itching tends to develop more rapidly with subsequent reinfestation.

Scabies is contagious, and is spread by close physical contact. Family members, sexual partners, and children playing in close proximity or “sleeping over” are most commonly affected. Although the mite needs a human host to thrive, it can live up to a week on objects, so scabies can also be caught by wearing clothes that have scabies mites in them.

Treatment

- * Everyone in the household must be treated, even if they are not itching.
- * Treatment for the entire household must occur on the same night.
- * The prescribed lotion or cream should be applied from the neck down (jaw line in the front, hairline in the back).
- * All parts of the body are to be covered, including between fingers and toes, under the fingernails and toenails, underarms, bellybutton, between buttocks and genital areas.
- * Dress in clean clothing after the treatment.
- * Leave lotion or cream on overnight. Bathe or shower in the morning to rinse off the medication.
- * Wash all clothing and towels that were used in the week prior to treatment. Vacuum carpeting, and upholstered furniture. Dispose of vacuum bag.
- * In the morning, wash all bed linens. Whoever does the laundry should complete the task before rinsing off the medication.

If it is known from whom the scabies was contracted, avoid being with that person until he/she has been treated as well.

Family members or friends in other households for whom treatment has been suggested should follow the same treatment plan, with each household treating all members on the same night. Contact between households should be avoided until everyone has been treated.

The rash and itching can last up to 4 weeks after treatment, but should be gradually improving. Renewed or worsening itching may be a sign of reinfestation with scabies or of improper use of the medication.