

SCABIES

What is it?

Scabies is a common and annoying condition caused by tiny insects (itch mites) that dig under the skin and lay eggs. This causes a very itchy rash. Scabies is spread by humans through skin to skin contact while shaking hands, dancing, sharing clothes, bedding or towels and by sexual contact. Scabies can affect anyone and is not caused by poor hygiene.

What To Look For?

Most people do not have any signs of scabies until about 3 weeks after the mite digs under the skin. Then a very itchy rash, especially at night, will appear. Mites prefer warm areas such as folds of skin, usually:

- between the fingers, toes and under the nails
- around the wrists, elbows and knees
- in the armpits, under the breasts
- along the belt line and navel
- on the inner thighs, buttocks, groin and genitals.

The rash looks like curvy white threads, tiny red bumps, scratches or tiny blisters. The rash may be crusty or scaly skin in people who have a lowered immune system, such as HIV.

Scratching the rash can allow bacteria to get into the injured skin and lead to other skin irritations or infections.

Scabies needs to be diagnosed by a doctor as other skin conditions can also cause a rash and itching.

How is it treated?

A medicated lotion can be bought at the drugstore without a prescription. If you are pregnant or breastfeeding, talk to a doctor or pharmacist.

Follow the instructions carefully.

Do not have close contact with others. *Your sexual partners and household contacts within the past month need to be treated at the same time.*

On the same day that you use the medicated lotion, wash your bedding, towels and clothes in hot water. Place these in the dryer on the hottest cycle for 20 minutes. Dry clean anything that cannot be washed or place items in a sealed plastic bag for 3-7 days. Vacuum your mattress and empty out the vacuum.

Itching can last for several weeks after treatment with the medication. Itching is due to eggs and waste material under the skin that was left behind by the mites. Itching can also be caused by the treatment as it dries out the skin. The itching will go away with time. A second treatment may be necessary.

It is best to avoid sexual contact until both partners are treated and the itching goes away.

Remember: Condom use will help prevent the spread of STIs, HIV and Hepatitis B.

**For more information call Peel Health 905-799-7700
and ask for Sexual Health Information
or visit
intheknowpeel.ca peelsexualhealth.ca peelregion.ca/health**