

Scabies Patient Information

What is scabies?

Scabies is a common and very itchy skin rash caused by a tiny mite. Anyone can get scabies; it has nothing to do with poor hygiene.

What causes scabies?

- The mites that cause scabies are tiny parasites called *Sarcoptes scabiei*.
- They are usually spread by direct skin-to-skin contact with someone who already has scabies.
- It is common for several members of a household to have scabies at the same time as it spreads easily amongst people who live together.
- Scabies is sometimes spread indirectly by sharing items such as clothing, towels or bedding that have been used by a person with scabies, but such spread is very uncommon.
- Scabies is spread easily to sexual partners.
- People affected have an average of about a dozen adult mites on their skin; a few carry many more.
- It can affect people of any age but is most common in the young and the elderly.

Most common signs and symptoms

Pimple - like rash with intense itching, especially at night. Itching and rash may affect much of the body or be limited to areas such as the wrists, armpits, between fingers, genital area and buttocks.

Is scabies serious?

No, not usually. If unrecognized, in the long-term, scabies can lead to other localised skin infections.

How is it treated?

Scabies is treated first-line with permethrin cream (Lyclear®) or with malathion lotion (Derbac M®) as a second-line option. You can buy either product from a pharmacy without a prescription, but it is better to see your doctor first.

It is recommended to apply the product twice; once at the start of treatment and repeat one week later.

Who needs treatment?

All household members and anyone who has been in close contact with the person with scabies should all be treated at the same time as a precaution, even if they do not have any symptoms.

How to apply lotion or cream?

- Follow the instructions provided by your doctor or pharmacist and the product information provided.
- Ensure skin is clean, dry and cool before putting on the cream (do not have a hot bath or shower beforehand).
- It is best to apply at night.
- Take off all your clothes including jewellery. (If you cannot remove a ring, move it to apply to the skin surface underneath).
- Apply to the whole body below the ears paying particular attention to the areas between the fingers and toes, wrists, armpits, external genitals, buttocks, skin folds and under finger and toenails.

- For infants, children up to age two, adults aged over 65 years, the immunocompromised or for those whose treatment has previously failed, you will also need to apply product to the scalp, neck, face and ears.
- If the product is to be applied to the head, avoid the eyes and, in young children, avoid the mouth area where the cream or lotion may be licked off.
- Brush some of the product under the nails with a soft nail brush as mites can easily escape treatment in the thickened skin there.
- Nails should be trimmed and kept short for the duration of treatment.
- You will need someone else to apply product to your back or areas you cannot reach.
- The product should be re-applied to the hands if they are washed with soap and water.
- Let the cream or lotion dry (this takes 10-15 minutes) before getting dressed or it may rub off. Do the soles of your feet last after application to the body has dried. This is best done with your feet resting on top of or dangling over the side of a bed or chair.

How long to leave treatment on?

- Permethrin cream (Lyclear) must remain in contact with the skin for 12 hours.
- Malathion liquid (Derbac M) must remain in contact with the skin for 24 hours.

If washing any area during this treatment period, put more product on the area you wash, for example, on hands or skin after handwashing, after changing nappies or continence wear.

How to wash off products?

After the product has been on for the appropriate time, it should be washed off, initially with cool water and no soap. Once everything is washed off, a shower or bath with soap may be taken.

Use clean towels to dry the skin and wash towels after use.

Remember to repeat the treatment after 7 days, as two treatments are required.

After treatment is complete

Most people with classical scabies are cured after two treatments, although itching may continue for a few weeks after successful treatment. Calamine lotion, emollients or antihistamines may help to relieve itchy skin. If you are very itchy or if symptoms persist, contact your GP.

Return to work or school?

Adults and children can return to work or school 24 hours after the first application of cream or lotion.

Bedding, clothing and towels

Bedding, clothing and towels should be washed / tumble-dried at high temperature to destroy mites.

Items that can't be washed or dry-cleaned should be sealed in a plastic bag for 4 days to destroy mites.

Hoover any sofa or mattresses your skin has been in direct contact with for a long time.

Pregnancy & Breastfeeding

Pregnancy: both products may be used as outlined above.

Breastfeeding: care must be taken that the breastfeeding infant does not suckle on treated skin (thereby avoiding oral ingestion of the treatment lotion or cream).

Further information on scabies: <https://www.hpsc.ie/a-z/other/scabies/factsheets/>