

Scabies - Patient information leaflet

Key points

Scabies can be a sexually transmitted infection
It is passed from one person to another by close body contact
Treatment is simple

What is scabies?

- ❖ Scabies can be a sexually transmitted infection. It is caused by the mite *Sarcoptes scabiei*.

How do you get scabies?

- ❖ You can catch scabies when you have sex or close bodily contact with someone who already has the infection.
- ❖ Even if you have had scabies before, you can still catch it again.

What are the symptoms of scabies?

- ❖ The most common problem is itching which may take up to 6 weeks to develop.
- ❖ You may notice silvery lines (about 0.5 cm long) especially between your fingers, on the front of your wrists, elbows, nipples and genital area.
- ❖ They can cause itchy red lumps, especially in the genital area.

Do I need any tests?

- ❖ The doctor may wish to use a very small needle to take a sample of skin to look at under a microscope to make the diagnosis.
- ❖ If you think you have been in contact with scabies, or other infections, or have symptoms that could be scabies you should visit your family doctor or local sexual health or venereology/dermatology clinic.
- ❖ If you have scabies and have had more than one sexual partner in recent months or a new partner, you should also be tested for other sexually transmitted infections such as HIV, syphilis, gonorrhoea and chlamydia, as you can have more than one infection at the same time.

What is the treatment for scabies?

- ❖ Scabies is usually treated with a lotion or cream which should be applied to your whole body including your scalp, skin folds and under your nails. This needs to be left on for a different amount of time depending on which lotion is used, and may need to be repeated after one week.
- ❖ After treatment you also need to wash your clothes and bedding at a temperature of at least 50°C to kill the scabies mites (or you could place them all in a sealed plastic bag for at least 72 hours).

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Should I have sex if I have scabies?

- ❖ You should avoid any close contact until you and your partner have both been treated.

What are the possible complications of scabies?

- ❖ Even after successful treatment, you may continue to itch for several weeks. You can use a simple emollient cream to reduce the itching.
- ❖ In people who are immunocompromised including people with HIV, crusted scabies can develop. You might notice lumps on the palms of your hands, soles of your feet and buttocks, armpits and scalp. This form of scabies is highly contagious and so means you will need a longer course of treatment and also to be kept isolated until you are cured.

Scabies and pregnancy

- ❖ There is no risk to your pregnancy or baby.

Do I need to tell my partner?

- ❖ If you do have scabies, it is advisable that your current sexual partner, and any other sexual partner(s) you have had over the last six weeks, is examined and treated. This is to stop you getting the infection again.

Further help and information

- ❖ If you suspect that you have scabies or any other sexually transmitted infection, then see your family doctor or local sexual health or venereology/dermatology clinic.