



## School and Child Care Guidance for Scabies (updated 1/31/23)

### What are scabies?

Scabies is caused by an infestation of mites that burrow under the upper layer of the skin of humans where it lives and lays eggs. While on the skin's surface, the scabies mites feed off sloughed skin and skin secretions, or hair follicle secretions and require human hosts to survive.

### What causes scabies?

A parasitic mite-- *Sarcoptes scabiei* var. *hominis*

### What are the symptoms of a scabies infestation?

Signs of infestation can take up to six weeks to be noticeable and generally consists of a "pimple-like" rash and thin burrow tracks that could look like a line of tiny blisters or bumps. A normal healthy person may complain of itching that increases at night, however the response to scabies may be muted in the immunocompromised or elderly. Children younger than 2 years are likely to be infested on the head, neck, palms, and soles of feet or in a diffuse distribution over the body.

### How does scabies spread?

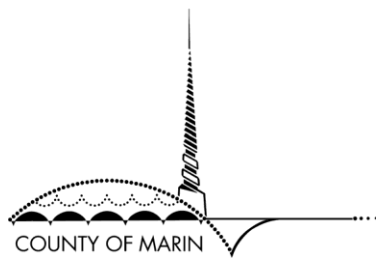
Typical scabies usually is spread by direct, prolonged, skin-to-skin contact with an infested person, such as when holding hands, giving a person a bath, applying lotions, etc. A quick handshake or hug usually will not spread typical scabies. Any person who has had direct contact with someone who has scabies may be at risk. Scabies is spread easily to sexual partners and household members. Scabies sometimes spreads indirectly by sharing articles such as clothing, towels or bedding used by an infested person.

### What is the time from exposure to symptom onset?

The earliest and most common symptom of scabies is severe itching, especially at night. A pimple-like, itchy "scabies rash" is also common. These symptoms are caused by a type of allergic reaction to the proteins and feces of the scabies mites. If the body has never been exposed to the proteins and feces of the scabies mite before, it takes the immune system some time to develop this reaction and become sensitized. For this reason, when a person is infested for the first time, symptoms usually do not appear for up to two months (two to six weeks). If a person has had scabies before and is therefore already sensitized to the mite and its saliva and feces, symptoms usually appear one to four days after exposure.

### How long is an infected person contagious?

A person with scabies is considered infectious as long as they have not been treated. Infested pieces of clothing and bedding are considered infectious until treated. After treatment, a person may unknowingly reinfest themselves by coming into contact with the same person who had scabies to begin with or with someone else who has scabies. An infested person can still spread scabies even if they do not have symptoms.

**How is a scabies infestation diagnosed?**

Diagnosis of a scabies infestation usually is made based upon the appearance and distribution of the rash and the presence of burrows. Whenever possible, the diagnosis of scabies should be confirmed by identifying the mite or mite eggs or fecal matter (scybala). However, a person can still be infested even if mites, eggs or fecal matter cannot be found; fewer than 10-15 mites may be present on an infested person who is otherwise healthy.

**How is a scabies infestation treated?**

Products used to treat scabies are called *scabicides* because they kill scabies mites; some also kill mite eggs. Scabicides used to treat human scabies are available only with a doctor's prescription.

In addition to the infested person, treatment is recommended for household members, particularly those who have had prolonged direct skin-to-skin contact with the infested person. All persons should be treated at the same time to prevent reinfestation.

Because the symptoms of scabies are due to a hypersensitivity reaction (allergy) to mites and their feces, itching still may continue for several weeks after treatment even if all the mites and eggs are killed. If itching still is present more than two weeks to four weeks after treatment or if new burrows or pimple-like rash lesions continue to appear, retreatment may be necessary. Skin sores that become infected should be treated with an appropriate antibiotic prescribed by a doctor. Use of insecticide sprays and fumigants is not recommended.

**Should children or staff be excluded?**

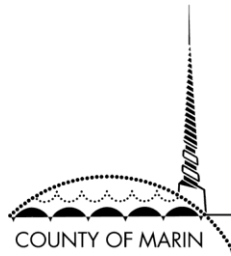
Children and staff should be excluded until treatment has been completed (usually overnight).

**How can schools prevent scabies infestations?**

Use appropriate isolation and infection control practices, which include the following:

- Wash hands thoroughly after providing care to any person with soap and water
- Avoid skin-to-skin contact with persons who have scabies for at least 24 hours after application of an effective scabicide treatment
- Keep infested or exposed staff from returning to work until the day after receiving a dose of treatment
- Instruct symptomatic staff that provide hands-on care to use disposable gloves for several days after treatment until they are sure they are no longer infested
- Bedding, clothing, and towels used by infested persons or their close contacts (as defined above) anytime during the three days before treatment should be decontaminated by washing in hot water and drying in a hot dryer, by dry-cleaning, or by sealing in a plastic bag for at least 72 hours. Scabies mites generally do not survive more than two to three days away from human skin
- If itching is still present more than two to four weeks after treatment or if new burrows or pimple-like rash lesions continue to appear, retreatment may be necessary

If you have questions regarding communicable diseases in the school or child care setting, please email [HHSSchools@marincounty.org](mailto:HHSSchools@marincounty.org) or call (415) 473-2398



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