

# SCABIES

Scabies is a skin condition caused by tiny mites burrowing into your skin. Your skin will feel very itchy and a red rash appears soon after the itching starts. Often, itching begins on your hands between your fingers, then spreads across your whole body, apart from your head. Itching is worse at night and can make sleeping difficult.

In young children, older people, and people with a weakened immune system the rash may also develop on their head and neck. People with a weakened immune system may develop crusted scabies: their skin will look scaly and will have lots of mites.

Scabies mites are so small you often can't see them at all. If you do, they will look like tiny specks. Female mites burrow into your skin to lay their eggs, leaving tunnels that look like thin, silver lines on your skin, about 2-10mm long. These tunnels are often between your fingers, on the inside surface of your wrist and on your hands.

Scabies mites can only move from one person to another by direct and prolonged physical contact with an infected person, such as holding hands, having sex, or sharing clothing, towels and bedding.

## How can I treat scabies?

Scabies is not a serious condition, but you will need to treat it with an insecticide to kill the mites. Your pharmacist will recommend a treatment for you to use, usually **permethrin** cream or **malathion** liquid. Permethrin is usually recommended to be used first. If permethrin cream doesn't work or you cannot use it then you may use malathion liquid.

To stop you getting infected again, treat everyone in your household and all your close contacts, even if they have no rash or itching. This is because it can take up to 8 weeks for the rash to appear. See your doctor before treating children under 2 years old.

**Aim to treat everyone on the same day.** Don't have a bath or shower just before using the treatments because they may not work as well.

### Permethrin 5% cream

#### Step 1:

Spread the cream over your whole body, including your scalp, neck, face and ears. Cover the areas between your fingers and toes well, and brush the cream under the ends of your nails. A 30g pack of cream is usually enough for one adult but larger adults might need 2 packs.

**Step 2:**

Leave the cream on for 8 to 12 hours and then wash it off. If you do wash some of it off before 8 hours, for example, if you need to wash your hands, then put more on.

Repeat steps 1 and 2 after 7 days.

**Malathion 0.5% liquid (Derbac M)****Step 1:**

Spread the lotion over your whole body, including your scalp, neck, face and ears. Cover the areas between your fingers and toes well, and brush the cream under the ends of your nails. 100ml (half a 200ml bottle) of lotion is usually enough for one adult.

**Step 2:**

Leave the lotion on for 24 hours and then wash it off. If you do wash some of it off before 24 hours, for example, if you need to wash your hands, then put more on.

Repeat steps 1 and 2 after 7 days.

**Wash your clothes, bed linen and towels at 50°C or above on the day that everyone is treated.** Put away any items that you can't wash in a plastic bag for 72 hours or longer. Mites will die if they are away from a human body for longer than about 36 hours.

## What else can help?

If itching is troubling you or a family member your pharmacist may give you an antihistamine that makes you drowsy. This does not relieve the itch directly, but can help you sleep if itching is a problem at night. Chlorphenamine comes as a liquid (for ages 1 and older), or tablets (for ages 6 and older). Use the correct amount for each person's age and give the dose at bedtime.

## Why won't my scabies go away?

Your skin will take a while to settle down. The itching may carry on for 2 to 3 weeks after you have treated your scabies, even if the treatment has worked.

Sometimes the treatment doesn't work because:

- you didn't put enough cream or lotion on your skin
- you didn't leave the cream or lotion on your skin for long enough
- a close contact of yours was not treated at the same time as you and has given scabies back to you.

## Do I need to see my doctor?

See your doctor if:

- your child is under 2 years old and you think they need scabies treatment
- you feel very ill
- you think your skin may be infected. Signs of an infection are: a high temperature, red and swollen skin that feels warm.
- you've put cream or lotion on twice and new mite tunnels are appearing in your skin, or you are still itching 2 to 3 weeks after treatment.

## Can I give scabies to other people?

Yes, scabies is easily passed on to your close contacts and people in your household. You will pass on scabies to another person if your skin is in contact with theirs for 15 to 20 minutes. You are unlikely to pass on scabies from a short handshake.

Scabies mites die if they are away from a human body for 24 to 36 hours. You can pass on scabies to people if they use your bedding, clothes and towels, but this doesn't happen often: skin-to-skin contact is the usual way of passing on scabies.

You can go back to work or school as soon as you have finished your first treatment.

## Where can I find further information?

NHS Direct Wales: [www.nhsdirect.wales.nhs.uk](http://www.nhsdirect.wales.nhs.uk)

NHS Direct Wales Tel: 0845 4647 (open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week)

Calls from landlines and mobiles cost 2p per minute, in addition to telephone providers access charge.