

## **GETTING RID OF SCABIES**

The mite insect that causes scabies is so small it cannot be seen with the naked eye. The sores created by the scabies mite scab over, hence the name scab-ies. Extreme itching is the first symptom. But unsightly tiny bumps and scabs — and even skin infections — can follow.

Female mites dig into the top layer of skin and lay eggs and leave stool and other secretions there. This provokes the bumps and inflammation of scabies. It doesn't take long (about 2 weeks) for your body to become sensitive to the presence of the mites. Sometimes itching begins even before the skin shows signs of inflammation.

Scabies spreads quickly among people living in a household or in nursing homes. The mites can be passed by skin-to-skin contact, sharing infested clothes, or sleeping in the same bed. Poor personal hygiene encourages the spread of scabies, but even very clean people may become infested. The mites can live for 2 to 3 days on furniture, floors, and other objects, so it's possible — but not likely — to pick them up by touching these items.

Special prescription creams and lotions such as Elimite (generically permethrin), which are applied from head to toe and left on for a specified period of time, usually kill the mites. You may want everyone in your household to be treated at the same time. The pediatrician will prescribe for the kids--parents should contact their own physician. You'll want to take some other steps to make sure the mites stay away:

Try not to scratch. You can get the mites, their eggs, or larvae under your fingernails and spread them. Scratching may also introduce bacteria and lead to infection, which may require antibiotic treatment. The mites cannot survive temperatures greater than 120°F for longer than 5 minutes. Kill the mites by washing all your recently used garments, linens, and blankets in hot water or pressing them with a hot iron. Keep your living quarters clean by vacuuming the floors and beds daily. Keep everyone's bodies clean by enforcing daily showers or baths for awhile.

Mild topical steroid creams (Cortaid or Cortizone) may relieve the itching, but they must not be used until after the scabies treatment is finished. You may want to take an oral antihistamine such as Benadryl until then to relieve further itching.

After treatment, it may take up to 6 weeks for itching and skin lesions to totally disappear. But if you've followed the medicine box instructions, you're not likely to pass on scabies after 24 hours has passed.