

## **SCABIES – Information leaflet**

### **What is Scabies?**

Scabies is an infestation caused by a microscopic mite. It is found worldwide and affects people of all races and social classes. The mite, which is only a few millimetres long, burrows into the top layer of the skin where it lays its eggs. This irritates the skin, causing intense itching which is usually worse at night.

### **How Is It Spread?**

Scabies can be transmitted to other people by direct, prolonged, skin-to-skin contact with a person already infected with scabies. Contact must be prolonged (for example: shaking hands or brushing against someone will not transmit scabies).

There is also a slight risk of transmission from sharing clothes and bed linen that were in direct contact with the skin of an infected person for a prolonged time. Sexual partners and household members of a case are therefore at an increased risk of getting infected.

Anyone can get scabies regardless of age, sex, race or standards of personal hygiene. The only way to stop the spread of scabies is to treat infected individuals and all close contacts (whether or not they themselves have scabies) at the same time.

### **What Are The Symptoms?**

The main symptoms are tiny red bumps, severe itching and scratching. The itch is often worse at night or after a hot bath. Scratching may lead to the rash becoming infected.



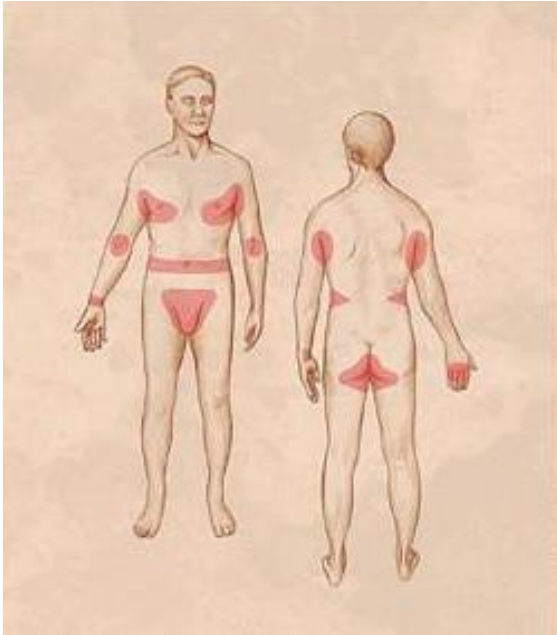
It may take 4 to 6 weeks for symptoms to develop in people who haven't had scabies before. People who have had scabies before usually develop symptoms much more quickly if they are exposed again, usually within one to four days.

The rash can be present anywhere on the body, often in the soft skin in the webs between fingers, the wrists, armpits, belly button, under the breasts and between the buttocks.

### **Who Should Be Treated?**

People who have had significant skin-to-skin contact with a person who has

scabies within the past two months should be treated, in case they have become infected with scabies. A casual handshake is not significant skin-to-skin contact.



The people who should be treated are:

- All people who live in the same household as the case.
- People who have had prolonged skin contact with the affected person (eg. sexual contacts)

It is important that all the people are treated at the same time (within 24 hours of each other) to eradicate the mites at the same time and avoid re-infection.

### **How is the treatment applied?**

Scabies is treated with malathion (*Derbac*) lotion or permethrin (*Lyclear*) dermal cream.

- First take a shower and dry yourself well.
- Apply the product to the entire skin surface from behind the ears downwards, avoiding the face and scalp.
- It is very important that the product is applied to the whole skin, especially between the fingers and toes, the genital area, under the nails (nails should be cut short), palms of hands and soles of the feet, buttock folds.
- Allow a few minutes for the product to dry before putting on clean clothes.
- If using malathion (*Derbac*) the lotion should be left on the skin for 24 hours before having a shower. If using permethrin (*Lyclear*) dermal cream leave the cream for 8 to 12 hours before having a shower. Ideally this procedure is done in the evening so that the cream is left on throughout the night, and then washed off the next morning.
- Do not wash before the required time period after application has passed! If you wash your hands during this period, you need to reapply the lotion/cream on the hands immediately.

- You also need to wash any clothes, towel, bed linen used in the prior 2 days using hot water (>50°C). If washing the clothes and linen is not possible, put them in a plastic bag and keep them for 72 hours in the sun.
- Cases of scabies need to reapply the treatment after 1 week. Close contacts of cases who do not have any signs or symptoms of scabies should only apply the treatment once.

### **Remember!**

The itch and rash of scabies can last for up to four weeks after the mite has been eliminated. It does not mean that the treatment has failed. If still symptomatic after this period, or if itchiness increases and/or fresh spots appear, seek medical advice.

***If you would like further information, please contact the Infectious Disease Prevention and Control Unit on 23266111, 23266122, 23266109.***