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## Factsheet on Scabies

Images used have been obtained from the website of the Department of Medical Entomology, University of Sydney and Westmead Hospital, Australia and Dept. of Dermatology, Waikato Hospital, Hamilton, New Zealand:

<http://www.dermnet.org.nz/arthropods/scabies.html>

### What is Scabies?

*Sarcoptes scabiei* is a human mite which penetrates the outer layers of the skin. The body's immune system reacts to the mite's droppings and saliva resulting in an immune reaction, which produces an intense itching.

The incubation period is up to 8 weeks after contact with an affected person. Skin penetration is visible as papules, vesicles or tiny linear burrows containing the mites and their eggs.

The lesions occur mainly on the hands, finger webs, wrists and inside of arms, abdomen/waist, groins and under buttocks.

In infants, the head, neck, palms and soles may be involved; these areas are often spared in older individuals.

The intense itching is aggravated by warmth and moistness. Itching occurs especially at night or after a hot bath or shower.

Because of scratching lesions can develop a secondary infection.

### How is scabies spread?

The mite is transferred to other people by prolonged, direct skin-to-skin contact, especially via the hands. It can also be acquired during sexual contact. Transfer from underclothes or bed linen may occur if these items have been contaminated by an affected person immediately before contact; mites do not survive away from their host, as it is too cold for them outside the skin.

An individual is infectious until after effective treatment and should be kept away from work, school, day hospital etc, until this has been completed.

## How is scabies treated?

Permethrin is the treatment of choice. This is usually with a cream or lotion, available through your general practitioner. The following principles should be followed:

1. Apply the cream over the whole body onto clean, cool, dry skin, but NOT directly after a bath ;
2. Ensure the cream is put under the nails, on the skin of the face up to the hairline, behind the ears, the soles of feet and on the genitals regardless of manufacturer's instructions taking care to avoid eyes, nose and mouth ;
3. Directly after treatment, put on clean clothes and change the bed linen;
4. Leave the cream on for 8-12 hours (overnight treatment will ensure this);
5. If you wash your hands within 8-12 hours, reapply the cream to the hands making sure to put cream under the nails. Re-treat all symptomatic people after 1 week;
6. All bed partners and CLOSE family contacts should also be treated as above but only 1 treatment is required if they are not symptomatic themselves.

After treatment it may take up to 3 weeks for the itching to stop, but this does NOT mean treatment has failed. Itching is a result of an allergic reaction to the mites. Piriton may help to relieve the itching. Health care workers should use plastic gloves and aprons at all times when having direct contact with an affected person or their laundry. Forearms should also be protected by a long-sleeved gown.

Washing of linen as usual is all that is required.

For patients with suspected scabies in care homes please call Essex HPT for advice on management of contacts.

### Scabies mite



### Burrows on the hand



Please Note:

If you would like further advice, but are not from the Essex area, please contact your local Health Protection Team. Details can be found at <http://www.hpa.org.uk/HPAWebHome/> and search by entering your postcode in 'Health protection services in your region'.