

*Scabies is an infestation of the skin by tiny mites. It is transmitted through close physical and sexual contact. Scabies is easily treated with a lotion.*

## Scabies

Last updated 25 March 2011

### What is scabies?

Scabies is an infestation of the skin by tiny parasitic mites that are very hard to see. Scabies mites burrow under the skin where they live and reproduce.

### What are the symptoms?

- The most common symptom is intense itching. This is caused by the mites burrowing under the skin to lay eggs. The mites like warm areas of skin, especially the groin and armpits. The itch is often worse after a hot shower or in a warm bed.
- Tiny red or grey burrow tracks can appear between the fingers and on the wrists. They may also be found in armpits, on the buttocks, the penis and feet.
- Some people have a rash of very itchy red bumps. This is an allergic reaction to the mites and may take several weeks to develop.

Scabies are usually noticed within four weeks of exposure.

### How are they transmitted?

Scabies mites are transmitted by skin-to-skin contact with an infested person. This contact can be sexual or non-sexual. Occasionally they are transmitted by sharing towels, clothes or a bed.

### How is it prevented?

It is hard to prevent the transmission of scabies because they are easily caught from close body contact.

Go for a regular sexually transmissible infection (STI) check-up to find infections before complications develop and to prevent transmission to others. Always use condoms.

Using condoms and water based lubricant can significantly reduce the risk of other sexually transmissible infections

### How is it diagnosed?

Scabies is diagnosed by examining the itchy areas under a bright light. It is rare to see the scabies mites themselves because they burrow under the skin, but this often leaves fine red or grey marks that can be seen.

### How is it treated?

Scabies can be treated quickly and easily with a special cream or lotion. Follow the instructions carefully to make sure that you get rid of the mites completely. Treatment is usually repeated after one or two weeks. The itch often lasts for several weeks after treatment. Ask your doctor or pharmacist about the best treatment.

Wash any clothing and linen that you have been in direct contact with.

### **Telling partners**

If you have scabies it is important to tell your sexual partner so they can be treated, and so they do not pass the mites back to you or on to anyone else. You may also have to tell housemates if they have slept in the same bed as you, or shared towels, linen or clothing with you. Your doctor can help you decide who may be at risk and help you to contact them.

The information in this fact sheet is general and you should see a doctor if you are worried about your health.

### **Contact**

NSW Sexual Health Infoline freecall **1800 451 624**.