



MINISTERO  
DELL'INTERNO

## What is scabies?

Scabies is associated with **intense itching** that triggers a strong instinct to scratch. Itching typically occurs in the evening when you go to bed and can be annoying throughout the night, while you feel much less during the day. It is important to treat scabies as soon as possible, so that it does not spread to the entire household of those affected or among the people with whom they come into contact every day. For this reason and given the **high contagiousness** of the problem, it is advisable to treat all people who may have been infected by the parasite. **Contagion** occurs through **direct physical contact** or through personal items such as bedding or clothing.



## What causes scabies?

Scabies is caused by *Sarcoptes scabiei*, an 8-legged mite of microscopic size that digs burrows just under the skin, inside which females deposit their eggs. Upon hatching, 3-4 days after laying, the larvae ascend to the surface of the skin, where they develop and from where they leave to colonize other areas of the skin or infest other people.

## What are the symptoms of scabies?

**Allergic reaction** triggered by the parasites, their eggs and their residues, causes an **often-intense itching** that tends to worsen during the night. This itching may be associated with **small blisters**, especially at the level of skin folds. Among the most affected areas of the body are spaces between fingers, armpits, waistline, inside of the wrist, areas around breasts and male genitalia, and buttocks. In children, the most affected areas are scalp, face, neck, palms, and soles of the feet.

## How to prevent scabies?

To prevent contagion at home, it is important **to wash** at high temperatures (>60°C) all **clothing**, linen and towels that could be contaminated. Items that cannot be washed at home should be dry

cleaned. Alternatively, contaminated items that cannot be washed can be sealed in a plastic bag and left in the open air for a week.

Rooms, carpets, and upholstered furniture used by the person with scabies should be cleaned and vacuumed after use, and the vacuum cleaner bag immediately discarded.

Mattresses and domestic environments should be disinfected with steam jet tools.

## Diagnosis

Diagnosis of scabies involves a **thorough examination of the skin** by a dermatologist, who will look for signs of the presence of the parasite, including the tunnels that it digs into the skin.

It is possible for the dermatologist to take superficial samples from the skin (*scraping*) to confirm the presence of the mite and its eggs under a microscope or to use a manual dermatoscope.

## Treatments

**Treatment** of scabies is aimed at **eliminating parasites** using medicines in the form of creams or lotions. Generally, the medicine should be applied all over the body (except for the head in adults) in the evening and left on for at least 8-12 hours. It is necessary to perform a second treatment according to the dermatologist's instructions after 7 days from the first application. Given the contagiousness of the infestation, it is useful that the treatment is also carried out by people who have met the patient, even if they do not show symptoms of scabies.

Symptoms and lesions take up to 3 weeks to disappear despite the mites being killed. Treatment failure is due to resistance, poor penetration, incorrectly performed therapy and therefore deserving of dermatological revaluation.

To relieve itchy symptoms after treatment, it is possible to resort to the use of soothing creams.

Therapy of choice is based on **5% permethrin** cream to be applied all over the body and removed with water after 8-14 hours. Usually, therapy is repeated after one week. It is important to avoid hot bath before applying the treatment to the skin because the hot bath, by fostering vascular dilation, promotes the absorption of the acaricide and its passage into the systemic circulation, removing it from the site of skin action and increasing the risk of systemic side effects.

It can also be used 20% benzyl benzoate in the form of oil or cream: it should be applied for three consecutive evenings all over the body except for the head, and repeated application after 7 days. In selected cases, oral therapy based on ivermectin is also currently available. The latter is indicated in patients who do not respond to topical treatment or have poor compliance with it, or immunosuppressed patients with Norwegian scabies.

There are more and more cases that are particularly resistant to the available therapies, so it is advisable to contact a dermatologist specialist to identify the best therapeutic protocol to be applied to the individual patient.

Information by: **Dr. Roberta Calcaterra** *INMP Dermatologist*