

Scabies

Causes

Scabies is caused by a mite (*Saroptes scabiei*) which burrows under the skin, but the rash and itch are much more widespread than the location of the mites. The mite may be passed easily by close contact (and commonly starts at the wrist, presumably having been picked up through holding hand.)

Symptoms

The mite burrows into the skin, especially around the hands, feet, and pubic area. It does not usually affect the neck and head, although it may in infants. Small itchy blisters / red bumps (usually in a thin line) in several parts of the body.

The itching is due to an allergic reaction to the tiny mites, and is associated with a rash of red, raised spots. The itch is worse at night, and may often affect more than one family member.

Diagnosis

Sometimes burrows can be seen, especially near to the wrists and between fingers. The doctor may sometimes manage to remove a mite from a burrow in order to look at it under magnification.

The diagnosis can be made difficult because the rash can look like other itchy conditions e.g.: eczema.

Treatment:

The treatment of choice is *Permethrin*, in view of its relative safety, ease of application, and as it tends not to irritate the skin. This should be left on for at least eight hours.

The treatment kills the mites, but their bodies are still in the skin causing a skin reaction. The itch persists until our own natural defense systems break down and get rid of what is left of the mites. This process takes about two weeks and therefore the itch can continue for about two weeks after the treatment.

In the mean time you may find that an antihistamine tablet or medicine (either prescribed or bought over the counter) will reduce itching.

Clothing, bedding and towels recently used, should be washed in very hot, soapy water or dry-cleaned to prevent re-infestation. Store items that cannot be washed or dry-cleaned for one-two weeks away from human contact so the mites and their eggs will die.

Medication:

A medicated lotion will usually be prescribed.

Bathe thoroughly before applying the prescribed medication. Apply from the neck down and cover the entire body. Wait 15 minutes before dressing. Leave medication on the skin for 8 hours before bathing.

Your family or other close contacts should also be treated. You may need to repeat in one week.

Santa Barbara City College
Student Health Services
721 Cliff Drive, Santa Barbara, CA 93101
SS-170 ♦ 956-0581 ext. 2298
www.sbcc.edu/healthservices