

Scabies treatment

CATEGORY:

Treatments

WHY:

Scabies is a highly contagious skin disease that causes an itchy rash. It can spread easily between people; fortunately, it is treatable

WHAT:

Treatment options include permethrin cream (most common); malathion lotion; benzyl benzoate lotion; ivermectin pills

WHO:

The person diagnosed with scabies and all close contacts need treatment at the same time to prevent spread and stop it coming back

WHERE:

Creams/lotions are usually applied over the whole body; avoiding the eyes, in the ears/nose/mouth, and vagina

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE —



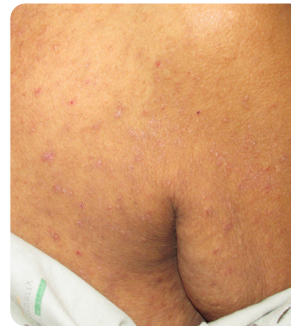
Scabies on the palm — remember to remove jewellery when treating with cream/lotion



Scabies bumps in the armpits — it is important to apply cream/lotion all over including skin folds



Close-up of a scabies burrow (the pale line) on the toe — don't forget to treat the feet too



Scabies rash on the trunk — it can be very itchy



Topical permethrin — the most common treatment



Ivermectin tablets — may be used for severe or persistent scabies

What is it?

Scabies is an itchy, **contagious** skin disease caused by mites (a type of tiny bug) called *Sarcoptes scabiei var. hominis*. The mite digs (burrows) into the top layer of the skin and lays eggs, causing an itchy skin reaction.

Anyone can get scabies. It is common in children, teenagers, young adults, and the elderly.

This leaflet explains how to treat scabies and focuses on **permethrin**, the usual treatment.

If you have scabies, everyone you live with or who has had close contact with you should be treated — even if they don't have symptoms.

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OVERVIEW —

There are different options to treat scabies.

Always check which treatment you've been given, as the instructions for use may vary.

Examples of topical treatments (applied to the skin) include permethrin, malathion, and benzyl benzoate. Oral treatments (pills) include ivermectin.

WHO TO TREAT —

All close contacts should be treated — even if they don't have symptoms. This includes:

- Household members and sexual partners
- Anyone you have had prolonged skin contact with (eg, caregivers, sports teams)
- People with whom you have shared clothing, towels, or bedding.

Treat close contacts **at the same time** to stop scabies from spreading further, or coming back. Pets do not need treatment.

PERMETHRIN TREATMENT —

The most common treatment for scabies is **permethrin 5% cream**. It is considered safe in pregnancy and for children aged 2 months and up.

Each person needs **two permethrin applications 7–10 days apart** to ensure that both the mites and the eggs are effectively treated.

How to apply permethrin:

1. Apply the cream to your whole skin surface from head to toe, usually before bed (including the face, scalp, behind the ears, under nails, in skin folds, and between toes).
2. Wait for it to dry on your skin (about 15 minutes) before putting on clean clothes
3. After 8–12 hours, wash off fully with water before using any soaps or moisturisers.

Important notes:

- Make sure skin is clean, dry, and cool (if bathing/showering, let skin first cool down)
- Clip and clean nails, and remove jewellery
- Avoid getting any product in the eyes, inside the nose/mouth/ears, or in the vagina
- Supervise children and assist others where required to ensure that the cream is applied thoroughly, including all over the back
- If any skin is washed during this time (such as hands), the product must be reapplied to that area.

Stay home until the day after the first treatment, or as per your child's daycare/school policy.

The amount of cream needed depends on your age and build, but as a general guide (per application):

- Age 12+ — 1 tube (30g)
- Children 6–12 years — half a tube (15g)
- Children 1–5 years — 1/4 tube (7.5g)
- Babies 2 months–1 year — 1/8 tube (3.75g).

IVERMECTIN TREATMENT —

Sometimes, a tablet called ivermectin may be used instead of, or in addition to, the cream — eg, if you:

- Have widespread/severe/resistant scabies
- Have a weakened immune system
- Live in a care facility or institution.

The dose of ivermectin is based on your weight, and you may need a further dose one week later.

OTHER MEASURES —

On the day you start treatment, make sure you:

- Hot wash and tumble dry clothes, bedding, towels, & soft toys used in the last 3–4 days
- Seal non-washable items (eg, shoes) in a bag for ≥4 days
- Clean and vacuum rooms and soft furniture.

Antihistamines, mild steroid creams, moisturisers, and menthol creams can be used to relieve itch, although won't get rid of the scabies itself.

OUTCOME —

Topical treatment (eg, permethrin) is often very effective if used correctly. Even after successful treatment, itching can last for several weeks.



<https://dermnetnz.org/topics/scabies>