

Scabies in Homeless Shelters

What is scabies?

Scabies is an infestation of a microscopic mite called *Sarcoptes scabiei* var. *hominis*. These mites live on human skin and infect people worldwide. Scabies infestations can happen to anyone including those who have had it before. They are often found in crowded settings such as homeless shelters, prisons, and nursing homes. A scabies infestation typically occurs with 10-15 mites.

What does scabies look like?

Patients with scabies can have intense itching and a rash of red or purple bumps. Tiny linear burrows may sometimes be seen, which are caused by mites tunneling just beneath the surface of the skin. Lesions are prominent around finger webs, wrists, elbows, armpits, belt line, thighs, stomach, and buttocks. Lesions also may be found on genitalia in men and on breasts in women.

What is crusted scabies?

A more severe form of scabies, also known as crusted, atypical, or Norwegian scabies, is characterized by a very large number of mites and eggs causing a crusted appearance and color changes of the skin, thickened nails, and hair loss. Large amounts of mites cause crusted infestations to be spread more easily. Crusted scabies is more often found in residents of shelters and other long-term facilities, jail inmates, people who are disabled and not able to take care of themselves, and those with weakened immune systems.

What are symptoms of scabies?

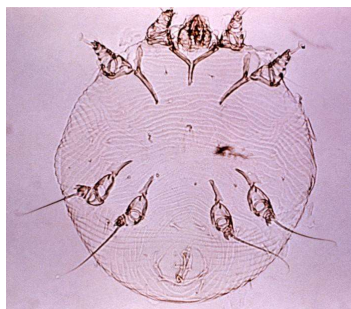
Itching may be intense, especially at night. For recurrent cases, rash and itching may occur over the entire body, not just the location where the mites burrowed. Symptoms usually take 2 to 6 weeks to develop for first time infections. It is important to treat scabies immediately as itching may lead to skin sores that can easily become infected with bacteria.

When do scabies symptoms start?

If a person is infested for the first time, symptoms may take anywhere from 2 to 6 weeks to develop. For those who have had scabies before, it usually takes 1 to 4 days for symptoms to develop.

Increased risk in shelters

People experiencing homelessness and staff at homeless shelters are at risk of acquiring certain infectious diseases, including scabies. The increased risk of scabies infestations can be due to several factors, including crowded conditions, high turnover of residents, unsheltered homelessness, sharing linens, and gaps in medical care and treatment.



How does scabies spread?

Scabies is spread from human to human. The most common way scabies is spread is through prolonged skin-to-skin contact with someone with scabies (quick handshakes and hugs usually do not spread scabies). The mites don't normally live longer than 3 days off human skin. Other ways scabies is spread include sexual contact, direct patient care, and sharing/handling of linens and towels.

When is someone infectious?

An individual can be infectious immediately after infestation, well before symptoms start.

What types of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) should I wear when interacting with someone who may have scabies or who has been diagnosed with scabies?

Gloves should be worn when examining any skin rash. When interacting with individuals who have suspected or who have been diagnosed with scabies it is recommended to wear personal protective equipment (PPE). This includes gloves, gown, and if applicable, a face shield (especially if laundering and there is a splash risk). Routine trainings should be held to educate staff in wearing and removing PPE and in identifying the symptoms of scabies.

How is scabies treated?

Scabies treatments are important to reduce symptoms and prevent spread of scabies to others. There are prescribed medications called scabicides that are available as a cream, such as permethrin 5% (Elimite), that kill the mites and eggs. Scabicide creams should be applied from the neck to the toes. Adults should avoid the head and face. It is important that clear instruction is given on how long to leave scabicides on the skin, which is usually stated on the prescription and on the box.

How long is treatment for scabies?

Usually, 1 treatment is sufficient in clearing the infestation. In some instances, a second application of scabicide may be warranted. For crusted scabies, oral tablets of scabicide may also be prescribed.

How long is isolation?

Individuals can stop isolating after 1 treatment. Itching may persist 1-2 weeks

after successful treatment.

Can infants and children be treated for scabies?

For infants and young children, the head and scalp can also be involved which should also be treated but only with specific creams prescribed by a doctor.

How should close contacts be treated?

Identifying close contacts is a priority since they should also be treated. A close contact to someone with scabies is any individual who had prolonged unprotected direct or indirect contact (skin-to-skin contact, sexual contact, direct patient care, or sharing/handling of linens and towels). Close contacts should be treated at the same time to prevent further infestation. For questions on identifying and treating close contacts, the Los Angeles County Community Outbreak Team can be consulted by messaging: communityoutbreak@ph.lacounty.gov.

How to obtain treatment for scabies?

If an individual is experiencing homelessness and your shelter does not have access to clinical services, contact the Department of Health Services (DHS) or call 211 to link them to a provider.



LA County Public Health Reporting Requirements

When there are at least 2 cases of suspected or confirmed scabies at a shelter during a six-week period, an outbreak should be reported to the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health (LAC DPH). A District Public Health Nurse will be assigned to gather more information shortly after. If there is a scabies outbreak at the facility, LAC DPH may be able to provide treatment. All treatment, guidance, and resources will be discussed by the District Public Health Nurse.

Please report scabies outbreaks as soon as possible to LAC DPH, Acute Communicable Disease Control (ACDC).

Please report scabies outbreaks as soon as possible to LAC DPH, Acute Communicable Disease Control (ACDC):
Acute Communicable Disease Control: 8am-5pm, Mon-Fri: (213) 240-7941
For urgent issues after hours: (213) 974-1234

Steps to Follow Upon Identification of Suspected or Confirmed Case(s) of Scabies

When there is no outbreak:

1. Upon identification of a suspected or confirmed case, immediately place the individual in a private room. If a private room is not available, maximize the physical distance between the case and others and follow all cleaning recommendations below.
2. Wash all clothing in hot water for at least 10 minutes along with hot dryer cycle. Any unwashable items can be dry cleaned or placed in a tightly sealed plastic bag for 3 to 7 days (scabies mites generally don't survive longer than 3 days away from human skin). There are no special considerations for furniture except to vacuum fabric. Clean all surfaces with disinfectant.
3. Identify close contacts. Place individuals in private rooms as needed.
4. Contact a medical provider for assessment and treatment options.
5. Immediately notify LAC DPH if other suspected or confirmed cases are identified within 6 weeks of each other.

When there is an outbreak (2 or more cases within 6 weeks of each other):

1. Upon identification of a suspected or confirmed case, immediately place the individual in a private room. If a private room is not available, maximize the physical distance between the case and others and follow all cleaning recommendations below.
2. Wash all clothing in hot water for at least 10 minutes along with hot dryer cycle. Any unwashable items can be dry cleaned or placed in a tightly sealed plastic bag for 3 to 7 days (scabies mites generally don't survive longer than 3 days away from human skin). There are no special considerations for furniture except to vacuum fabric. Clean all surfaces with disinfectant.
3. Identify close contacts. Place individuals in private rooms as needed.
4. Report the scabies outbreak to LAC DPH and work with the assigned District Public Health Nurse who will provide recommendations and discuss treatment options. Follow all guidance and site-specific recommendations.
5. Fill out a line list as soon as possible and send to the District Public Health Nurse.
6. Plan to assist with outbreak surveillance for up to 6 weeks from the last case. Surveillance period will be determined by the District Public Health Nurse.



Resources

DHS can be reached at 844-804-0055. If needed, there is also a DHS nurse line which is option 2 on the prompt.

<https://dhs.lacounty.gov/patient-information/get-coverage/nurse-advice-line-information/>

For information about 211 medical care referrals please visit the website or call 211:

<https://211la.org/resources/subcategory/healthcare>



211
LA COUNTY
Help Starts Here

- Information on LA County Services
- Food and Shelter Assistance
- Help with Landlord-Tenant Issues
- Employment Resources
- Disaster preparedness information
- Assistance with Medi-Cal and Food Stamps
- Help with Care for Aging Parents
- Parenting Resources
- Health and Legal Services
- AND MUCH, MUCH MORE

CALL 2-1-1 for FREE
Information on Health and Social Services

FUNDED BY:



www.211LACounty.org

For infectious disease questions and consultation regarding homeless shelters, schools, jails, congregate residential settings and worksites, please reach out to the Los Angeles County Community Outbreak Team.

Communityoutbreak@ph.lacounty.gov