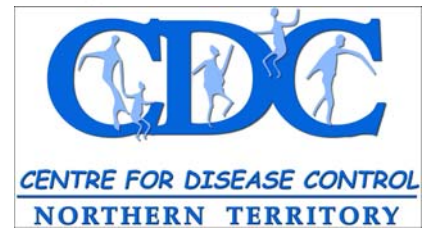


# Scabies



## What is scabies?

Scabies is a skin condition caused by a microscopic mite called *Sarcoptes scabiei*. The mite burrows under the skin and lays eggs, which make the person itch.

It is a common problem in many remote Aboriginal communities within the Northern Territory with up to 50% of children and 25% of adults affected in some places.

## What are the symptoms?

The first time someone is infected symptoms do not appear till 2-4 weeks after exposure. If someone has been infected previously, symptoms take 1-4 days to appear.



A red lumpy rash then appears. Sometimes little burrow markings about 10mm long can also be seen. In adults the rash is usually around the buttocks, wrist and ankles, and between the fingers and toes. It also commonly occurs in the folds of the skin around the armpits, elbows and genitals. In young children the rash may be from head to toe.



The rash is very itchy, often much more so at night.



## Are there any complications?

Scratching of the affected area often causes secondary infection with



*Staphylococcus* and *Streptococcus* bacteria. If this occurs antibiotic treatment may be required.

## How is it spread?

The scabies mite is spread from person to person by direct physical contact. Contact must be prolonged – a quick handshake or hug will not spread it. Although the scabies mite does not live long outside the human body it can also be spread by clothes and linen that have been used by a person with scabies if they have been worn or used immediately before.

A similar illness occurs in dogs, however the mite that causes dog scabies is different from that which causes human scabies.

## Who is most at risk?

Scabies occurs worldwide, however people living in crowded conditions with poor hygiene and malnutrition are most at risk.

## How is scabies treated?

### For the individual

There are currently a number of creams or lotions for the treatment of scabies for adults and children available. These include:

- 5% Permethrin (Lyclear)
- Benzyl Benzoate (Ascabiol, Benzemul)



For babies less than 2 months old:

- Crotamiton cream (Eurax)

Application of the treatment varies depending on which one is used, so it is important to read the instructions carefully.

The person who is infected should first have a shower or bath to soften the skin. The treatment should then be applied to the skin as per the instructions and left on for the recommended period of time before washing it off. Whilst the treatment is on the skin a complete set of new clothes should be worn.

It is recommended that treatment be repeated after 1 week.

Tingling and itching may still be present for 1 to 2 weeks after treatment.

### **For others in the house**

All members of the household and other close contacts should be treated at the same time as the infected person.

### **For the household**

All clothing, towels and linen need to be washed in hot soapy water and left to dry in the sun.

Mattresses and pillows should be put out in the sun and sprayed with a surface spray that contains pyrethroids. Curtains, chair covers and carpets may also need to be sprayed with surface spray.

### **How is scabies prevented?**

Early diagnosis and prompt treatment helps to prevent the spread of scabies.

Healthy Skin Programs are being conducted by many communities, for further information about this contact your nearest health centre

## **What is Crusted (Norwegian) scabies?**

While most people are infested with 10 to 12 mites, in crusted scabies, there is a proliferation of mites and people are infested with thousands of mites. Sometimes this happens because a person's immune system is not working well due to other illness. However, in most cases in the NT there are no underlying immune problems.

Crusted scabies does not look like scabies. Often there is no itch, and the rash appears as scaling, thickening and crusting of the skin. Often this appears on buttocks, elbows and arms.

Mild cases of crusted scabies can be treated in the community with creams, lotions and oral ivermectin. Severe cases will require admission to hospital.

### **Further information is available from:**

*Guidelines for the Community Control of Scabies and Skin Sores and Crusted Scabies in the Northern Territory*  
[http://www.nt.gov.au/health/cdc/treatment\\_protocol/scabies.pdf](http://www.nt.gov.au/health/cdc/treatment_protocol/scabies.pdf)

Top End Division of General Practice, 2003. Tropical Health in the Top End: an introduction for health practitioners. Darwin, Northern Territory.

Your nearest Centre for Disease Control on:

Darwin	8922 8044
Katherine	8973 9049
Nhulunbuy	8987 0359
Tennant Creek	8962 4259
Alice Springs	8951 7549