

Scabies is caused by a small mite (a type of insect). The mites can easily spread from person to person through close physical contact. They are not necessarily sexually transmitted.

Signs and symptoms

These are the same for both men and women. Sometimes the signs of scabies are difficult to see and you should get advice from a doctor or clinic.

You may have itching, which is only noticeable or becomes worse at night, or a rash or tiny spots.

These occur:

- on your hands, especially in between your fingers and on the side of your fingers
- on the top of your wrists and elbows
- underneath your arms
- on your abdomen and breasts, especially around the nipple in women
- on your genitals
- underneath your buttocks

Where to go for help

- Your own GP.
- Your pharmacist, who can sell you a treatment over the counter.
- Your local NHS sexual health (GUM) clinic. You can find details of your nearest NHS sexual health clinic in the phone book under genito-urinary medicine (GUM), sexually transmitted diseases (STD) or venereal diseases (VD). Or phone your local hospital and ask for the 'special' or GUM clinic. You will get free, confidential advice and treatment. You can go to any clinic anywhere in the country – you don't have to go to a local one – and you don't have to be referred by your GP. (Non-NHS sexual health clinics may not always offer the full range of services which are available at NHS sexual health clinics.)

Diagnosis and treatment

- A doctor can often diagnose scabies by giving you a physical examination and taking your medical history.
- A skin flake may be taken from one of the spots and examined under a microscope to look for evidence of a mite.

Scabies can be treated easily using a special lotion. Even after successful treatment, itching may take a few weeks to go away. Your doctor can prescribe tablets or a lotion to help with this.

The doctor is likely to advise you to avoid sexual contact with anyone until the course of treatment is completed.

Follow-up

You will probably not need to see the doctor, or clinic, again following treatment. Complications with scabies are rare.

However, if scabies was sexually acquired, a full check-up for sexually transmitted infections is advisable, as it is possible to have more than one sort of sexually transmitted infection at the same time. NHS sexual health (GUM) clinics routinely test for a number of sexually transmitted infections.

This factsheet is one of a series which give information on the following range of infections and diseases: bacterial vaginosis, chlamydia, cystitis, genital herpes, genital warts, gonorrhoea, hepatitis (A, B and C), non-specific urethritis, penile cancer, pelvic inflammatory disease (PID), prostate cancer, pubic lice, scabies, syphilis, testicular cancer, thrush and trichomonas vaginalis.

Free copies of any of these factsheets are available from GP surgeries, NHS sexual health (GUM) clinics, or your local health promotion unit (in the phone book under your local Health Authority).