

## Patient Information

### Scabies

#### Infection Prevention Team

Scabies is an irritating infestation of the skin, which causes intense itching and sometimes small broken areas of the skin. Although it is unpleasant, it is not serious and normally easy to treat.

Scabies is caused by a small mite (a bit like an insect) called *Sarcoptes scabiei*, which infests the epidermis (top layer of the skin). The mites can burrow slowly across the skin sometimes leaving characteristic tiny white lines, which can help to diagnose scabies.

The rash usually affects the inner side of the wrist and between the fingers, although it can also occur on the feet, buttocks, abdomen, elbows, around the nipples, between the groin or under the armpits. The itch may be worse at night.

In hospital, nurses or doctors who are experienced at recognising scabies may visit you. If they are unsure, they can take a small scraping of the surface of the skin which can be sent to the laboratory where scabies mites or their eggs can actually be seen under a microscope.

The treatment of scabies is relatively straightforward. This usually involves the application of a lotion or cream, leaving the cream on for a set period of time and then washing it off. In hospital a nurse will help you do this if you need assistance. **Please ensure you inform the nursing staff if you suffer from asthma or if there is a chance you may be pregnant, as this will decide which treatment you will be given.**

Even if the cream is successful, the itching may take some time to go away – sometimes even a few weeks. This is because the mite causes an allergic reaction in the body and it is this reaction that causes you to itch.

Scabies can be passed on to others but it is not as infectious as most people think. There must be prolonged close contact for the mite to be transferred from one person to another e.g. cuddling, holding or lifting. However, in the hospital environment where there can be a lot of close contact with nurses, doctor, physiotherapists etc, anyone with suspected scabies will be isolated (nursed in a side-room). Any hospital staff having contact with an affected person will be required to wear gloves and gowns to prevent the scabies being passed to other patients and staff. This will be necessary until 24 hours after the cream/lotion has been applied.

The doctor will probably advise that any close members of your family go to their GP to be treated for scabies as they could well have been affected also.

This can be a very upsetting time for you, but please be assured that scabies is relatively common, and is in no way associated with being dirty – this is a common misunderstanding.

There are nurses available in the hospital called Infection Prevention Nurses. The staff on the ward can contact them for you if you need more information.

## **INFECTION PREVENTION TEAM**

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