

Scabies

Scabies is an itchy rash, caused by the scabies mite. The skin often has spots, blisters and scratch marks. Scabies causes itching, especially at night, and typically affects the hands, armpits, and the genital area.

Infection

Scabies is passed on via skin contact, clothing and bed linen. Scabies usually does not spread easily; transmission typically requires repeated or close skin-to-skin contact. Symptoms begin 3–6 weeks after infection. In cases of reinfection, symptoms can start in just a few days.

If a person develops symptoms consistent with scabies, treatment can be started without consulting a doctor. Contact healthcare services if there is uncertainty about whether it is scabies or if scabies is suspected in a child under 2 years old, or in a pregnant or breastfeeding woman.

Treatment

In Finland, three prescription medications for the treatment of scabies are available. In addition to the person with scabies, all household members (including those without symptoms) and anyone who has had repeated or close skin contact during the previous 4–6 weeks should be treated at the same time. Everyone repeats the treatment after 7–14 days.

Prescription-free products include ointments **containing benzyl benzoate and disulfiram, and permethrin ointment**. A prescription from a doctor is required for **ivermectin tablets and sulphur ointment**.

During treatment with ointment, the nails are cut short. The ointment should be applied to dry, clean and cool skin. The ointment should be applied on the whole body, including the neck, ears and scalp. There is no need to treat the face if there are no skin changes. Particular care must be taken when applying the ointment between the fingers and toes, under the nails, on the wrists, armpits, palms, soles of the feet, external genitalia, and buttocks. Applying the ointment around the mouth and eyes must be avoided. If you have to wash your hands while applying the ointment, you must reapply the ointment on your hands.

- The benzyl benzoate ointment is left to take effect for at least 24 hours, after which it is washed off. This ointment is not recommended for pregnant women or children under 1 year of age; permethrin ointment is the primary treatment for them.

- The permethrin ointment is left on overnight, for at least 8–12 hours, after which it is washed off.

Ivermectin tablets can be used as an alternative to the above ointments. In crusted scabies and in epidemic situations, a combination of ointment treatment and ivermectin can be used if necessary. The doctor will prescribe the medicine in doses according to weight. The medicine is not recommended for pregnant women or children weighing less than 15 kg. The tablets are taken as a single dose and preferably with a fatty meal.

In addition to authorized medicinal products, the doctor can prescribe sulphur ointment prepared by the pharmacies themselves. Sulfur ointment is applied to the skin on three consecutive evenings and left on for 12–24 hours, preferably for a full 24 hours. If needed, you can repeat the treatment after 7–14 days, but usually one three-day treatment is enough.

The day after the treatment

All clothing, bed linen, towels, and cuddly toys that have been in direct contact with the skin during the week before the onset of symptoms should be replaced after treatment. The mattress is vacuumed and the blankets and pillows are either washed or vacuumed thoroughly and clean sheets are changed. Sofas, rugs and upholstered chairs should also be vacuumed.

There are several options for handling clothing:

- Wash on a minimum 50°C wash cycle.
- Seal in a plastic bag and keep at room temperature for at least seven days.
- Freeze in the freezer or outside (–18 °C or colder) for one day.

Use disposable gloves when cleaning. The cleaning is repeated during the second treatment.

Anyone who has come into skin contact with the infection should be notified, as should the child's daycare centre or school. Return to daycare or school is possible once the medication has been washed off the skin after 12 or 24 hours, depending on the ointment, or on the day after taking the tablet.

After the treatment, itching may persist for 2–4 weeks, this can be treated with cortisone ointment. If the itching persists, you should contact your healthcare services.

More instructions on the THL website [Syyhy - THL https://thl.fi/en/main-page](https://thl.fi/en/main-page)