

SCABIES - SCABBIA

Scabies is a parasitic disease caused by a small mite, in particular, pregnant female mites, which dig burrows (small tunnels) under the skin where they then lay their eggs. Other mites are born from these eggs, and after 8-16 days, these become adults, reproducing themselves and, consequently, new burrows appear on the skin. This cycle continues until an appropriate cure is given (scabies cannot be cured otherwise). Scabies is exclusively a human disease.

Contagion occurs through direct skin-to-skin contact from an infected individual to a healthy one, for example, sleeping in the same bed or, when adults are involved, during sexual relationships.

Rarely does contagion occur indirectly through bed linens, clothing, or towels shortly before used by a person infected with scabies. In fact, the parasite does not survive for long if not in contact with a human body.

The infected person is no longer considered contagious after the cure has terminated.

Scabies is present throughout the world. In the past few years, however, cases of scabies have greatly increased, involving individuals of all social and economic levels, without distinguishing age, sex, race, or personal hygienic conditions.

HOW DOES SCABIES MANIFEST ITSELF?

Scabies manifests itself through itching, which is more intense during the night, and with the appearance of burrows on the skin. As mentioned above, these burrows are small tunnel dug by the mite, which measure a few millimetres and are grey or white, ending with a swelling of the skin in which the adult female is lodged.

Skin lesions and marks provoked by scratching are common. These lesions and scratches can, in turn, become infected.

The lesions described are frequently located in the spaces between the fingers, as well as the wrists, elbows, underarms, and around the waist, thighs, and the area around the belly button in children; lastly, the genitals in men, and the lower region of the gluteus and around the areole of the nipples in women.

In very young children the head, neck, palms of the hands, and soles of the feet might become affected.

Itching can continue for weeks after recovery.

In individuals with an immune deficiency, the skin lesions are frequently more diffused and more serious while, on the contrary, itching might not occur.

HOW TO PREVENT SPREADING SCABIES

When **skin lesions appear, accompanied by intense itching, it is very important that the primary doctor be contacted immediately**, who then must prescribe the required tests.

If scabies is diagnosed, one must strictly follow all the cures prescribed and abide by all the necessary hygienic measures recommended, in particular, washing with hot water (at least 60°C) all linens, sheets, pillowcases, and towels used by the infected person.

Scabies is not a serious disease, but it is a highly contagious disease, especially for those in the immediate family, who are often advised to follow the same cure given to the patient, even if they do not present symptoms.

Updated: June 2003/Aggiornato a giugno 2003

Translated by Cooperativa INTEGRA/Tradotto dalla Cooperativa INTEGRA

With the contribution of the Province of Modena/Con il contributo della Provincia di Modena

For more information contact:
Per saperne di più, rivolgeti a: