

## INFECTIOUS DISEASES *facts*

### *Scabies - Facts*

#### **What is Scabies?**

Scabies is an infestation of the skin causing severe itching, especially at night.

#### **What causes scabies and how is it spread?**

Scabies is caused by a small mite about 1/3 of a mm long (smaller than the head of a pin.) The female mite burrows under the skin and lays eggs, and this causes red spots, lumps or lines. Scabies is usually spread by direct skin-to-skin contact. It can also be spread by towels, clothing or bedding if used right away, by another person.

#### **How do you know if you have scabies?**

Symptoms may appear within a few days or up to several weeks after contact with an infected person. Burrows containing the mites and eggs are most noticeable on the wrists, elbows, in body folds and the webs between the fingers. Burrows may occur on the head, neck, and palms of hands and soles of feet in infants. Due to an allergy to the mite, many people may be itchy over large parts of the body even though mites cannot be found there.

Scratching may change the usual appearance and cause raw, crusting areas. The most common symptom is itching, which is worst at night.

#### **How is scabies treated?**

It is best to see your family doctor for diagnosis and treatment of scabies. Skin rashes may occur for many reasons. For additional information on treatment issues, consult your pharmacist or a public health nurse. Special creams and lotions for treating scabies are available at drugstores without a prescription. **As with all medicine, follow the directions for use carefully. Do not leave the cream or lotion on for a longer time than stated in the instructions. Caution should be used when treating pregnant women and young children.**

A warm bath should be taken and the body dried and allowed to cool. The cream or lotion should be applied to the entire body from the neck down, making certain no areas are missed. Clean clothing and bedding should be used after treatment.

It is important that young children do not get the lotions or creams in their mouths because they contain insecticides. Covering their hands while being treated may be needed.

A second treatment a week later is recommended. Itching may continue for several weeks. New lines or lumps that appear after the second treatment would indicate the need for further treatment. Clothes, towels and bedding used within the past 48 hours must be washed and dried using the hot cycles of both washer and dryer or dry-cleaned. Hot ironing will also kill mites.

#### **For how long can scabies spread?**

Scabies can be spread until the mites and eggs are destroyed by treatment. An infected person should refrain from close contact with others until 24 hours after treatment has started. This means that children may return to school, 24 hours after treatment has been started.

#### **What about other household members?**

Scabies often spreads to other members of the family, so everyone living in the house should be treated at the same time as a preventative measure.

For more information please call Health Connection in the Barrie Office at (705) 721-7520.