

Getting rid of scabies

Mukua te waihakihaki

To get rid of scabies and make sure it does not come back, you need to carefully treat every member of the household and household items like bedding and clothing, all at the same time.

Treating members of the household

Members of the household need to be treated with creams or lotions called scabicides. The most common one is permethrin, which is available on prescription from your general practice team. Permethrin is safe for infants and pregnant or breastfeeding women.



Follow the specific instructions on the medication package. The instructions are likely to include these steps.

- 1) Apply the lotion to every member of the household. People who live outside the house who have close skin contact with members of the household should also apply the lotion. It is important that everyone applies the lotion at the same time, even if they do not have a rash or itch.
- 2) Massage the cream over the whole body, including the ears, scalp, hair, neck and face. This is particularly important for young tamariki (children) who are more likely to have scabies above their neck. Avoid the eyes and mouth. Pay special attention to between the toes and fingers and under the nails. Use a soft brush to get under the nails. When anyone washes their hands in the next 12 hours, they must reapply the lotion.
- 3) Wash the cream off 10 to 12 hours later.
- 4) Reapply permethrin one week after the first application even if the members of your household do not have any symptoms.

Household members can return to work or school one day after treatment.



Treating household items

Treat all fabric items that household members have worn or touched in the last 4 days.

Linen, towels, flannels, clothes and soft toys

Where possible, wash all items. Dry them in a clothes dryer for at least 10 minutes or iron them with a hot iron.

The scabies mite is not small enough to go through the weave of sheets. You do not need to wash mattresses, pillows and underblankets if you have used sheets and pillowcases.

Footwear and blankets

Treat them using one of the following methods:

- set them aside for 4 days in sealed plastic bags
- place them in large bags, spray fly spray inside the bags and seal the bags for 2 hours
- freeze the items overnight.

Other

Vacuum carpeted floors and upholstered furniture.

Spray fly spray over furniture and beds where sheets have not been used and avoid human contact for 4 days.

Things that could stop the treatment working

There are several things that could stop the treatment working or make it look like the treatment has not worked.

- If you do not follow all the treatment steps, you might not get rid of the scabies. It is also possible that someone who has not been treated could reinfect the household. If this happens, there is a risk that you might think the scabies treatment did not work.
- Even if the treatment worked well, the itch usually continues for up to 6 weeks. This can be confusing. If the itch continues, people can assume the treatment did not work or something else is causing the itch. If you believe that you completed the treatment correctly for the whole household, try to wait until the itch goes away.
- The treatment might not have worked because the diagnosis was wrong, and the rash and itch have another cause.

Next steps

Go back to see your general practice team 2 to 3 weeks after treating your household if the symptoms have not gone away.

Go back to see your general practice team if the itch does not go away after 6 weeks or comes back.

Written by HealthInfo clinical advisers. Last reviewed May 2025.