PATIENT & CAREGIVER EDUCATION

Isolation Precautions for Scabies and Lice

This information explains how isolation precautions are used to prevent the spread of scabies and lice while you're in the hospital.

Isolation precautions are steps we take to stop infections from spreading from person to person.

What is scabies?

Scabies is a skin condition that causes very itchy skin and a pimple-like skin rash. It's caused by tiny mites that burrow into your skin.

What are lice?

Lice are tiny insects that can be found in the hair on your head and body. Lice can live on your hair, scalp, eyelashes, and pubic area. They survive by feeding on human blood.

How are scabies and lice spread?

Scabies can be spread by direct skin-to-skin contact with someone who has scabies. Scabies can also be spread by sharing towels, bed sheets, and other personal belongings.

Lice can be spread by close contact with someone who has lice or by contact with their clothing, personal items, or linens.

How are scabies and lice treated?

Scabies and lice are treated with medication.

What isolation precautions are taken in the hospital if I have scabies or lice?

If you have scabies or lice while you're in the hospital:

- You will be placed in a private room.
- A sign will be posted on your door telling all staff to take precautions.
    - All staff will need to clean their hands with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand sanitizer before going into and after leaving your room.
    - All staff must wear a yellow gown and gloves while in your room. These are available outside of your room and can be disposed of inside your room. All staff must wash their hands after leaving your room.

- If you leave your room for tests, you must wear a yellow gown and gloves or be covered with a clean sheet.
- If you leave your room to walk around the unit, you must wear a yellow gown and gloves.
- You will not be able to go to the following areas of the hospital:
  - Pantry on your unit
  - Recreation center on M15
  - Pediatric recreation areas on M9
  - Cafeteria
  - Main lobby
- You can have art or massage therapy in your room while following isolation precautions.
- Your personal items and clothing will be placed in a sealed plastic bag and given to your family. They must be machine washed in hot water and placed in a hot dryer for at least 20 minutes.
- Any personal belongings that can't be washed will be placed in a sealed plastic bag and given to your family. They must be kept in the sealed bag for 5 to 7 days.
- After your treatment is finished, your healthcare provider will tell you when you can stop following these precautions.

What precautions should I take at home if I have scabies or lice?

- Don’t share personal items such as clothing, hats, combs, or hair accessories.
- Machine wash all of your personal items and clothing in hot water and place them in a hot dryer for at least 20 minutes.
- If your personal items can’t be washed, place them in a sealed plastic bag for 5 to 7 days.

Where can I get more information about scabies and lice?

If you have any questions, speak with your healthcare provider. You can also visit the following websites for more information:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Information on scabies:
About Lice | Lice | CDC

Information on lice:
About Lice | Lice | CDC

If you have questions or concerns, contact your healthcare provider. A member of your care team will answer Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Outside those hours, you can leave a message or talk with another MSK provider. There is always a doctor or nurse on call. If you're not sure how to reach your healthcare provider, call 212-639-2000.

For more resources, visit www.mskcc.org/pe to search our virtual library.

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