



### Scabies can be divided into three categories:

- 1) typical scabies (few mites, allergic component prominent)
- 2) transient scabies (allergic component prominent, mites disappear quickly)
- 3) crusted scabies (large number of mites).

### Diagnosing Scabies

For typical and transient scabies cases, skin scrapings have a low sensitivity, but specificity is high if the skin is examined by a skilled examiner.

The low sensitivity of skin scrapings in typical scabies cases is due to:

1. Few mites on a typical hypersensitive case (probably <10).
2. Not enough skin is scraped for laboratory examination. It is prudent to scrape the papules and as well as other areas. Papules and mites are however rarely associated since the allergic reaction is a systemic one and not due to a local reaction to the presence of a mite (except in crusted cases).
3. Scabies mites are mobile and readily walk all over the inside of a plastic container. If the skin is examined and not the container, then mites which may have left the skin flake prior to examination will be missed. To address this problem it is best to have the specimen examined with minimal delay. Of course if eggs and moults are present in the skin flakes, these can also be detected. It is also advisable for laboratory examination to include the use of a dissecting microscope to examine the walls and lid of the container.

The most sensitive diagnostic technique however is clinical. Key features used to identify a typical scabies case are the pruritic, symmetrical, non-blistering rash (often sub-acute or chronic). This will capture transient scabies cases due to a short-lived infection (but doesn't apply to crusted scabies). Laboratory specimens should still be submitted for confirmation, but a <30% positive rate can be expected.

### Treatment

All the epidermis must be treated. Treatment will be inadequate if any is missed. This will include the face, scalp and under finger and toe nails. If scalp hair is thick it is recommended that *permethrin* head lice treatment is used instead. Oral *ivermectin* simplifies treatment, but *ivermectin* is still not registered for use on typical scabies.

### Treatment of Contacts

It is recommended to treat all contacts, especially household members.

### Treatment of Environment

It is **ESSENTIAL** to treat the environment. In crusted cases, mites can be found in a variety of places including beds, floors, walls, chairs, carpets. Mites can be killed by insecticide and heat (usually at a temperature of 60°C for 5 mins).

A hot wash for bedding and clothes is recommended and if acceptable, a surface spray on floors and other items is recommended.