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Scabies at School

Dear Parent/Guardian:

We regret to inform you that a case of scabies has been identified at your child's school. Scabies is a contagious parasitic skin infection caused by tiny, almost invisible human itch mites. The mites burrow in the outer layer of skin where they live and reproduce. An itchy rash, the tell-tale sign of scabies, is caused by an allergic reaction to the parasite and usually begins about 4 weeks after exposure. The rash occurs most typically between the fingers, on the wrists, in other folds of skin on the body, and under elastic on clothing. The face, palms, and soles are almost never involved.

Scabies is spread by direct contact with an infested person, and to a lesser extent through contaminated clothing and bedding. The scabies mite does not "jump" from person to person, and does not survive very long in clothing or linens. However, scabies can spread quite rapidly among school children due to their close contact. They cannot infect or be transmitted by your pets. The infestation is not noticeable until about four weeks after exposure. The eruption of scabies causes intense itching, which is generally worse at night or after exercise when the body is warm.

To prevent further spread in school, we need your assistance. Please follow these recommendations:

1. Observe your child for a red, itchy rash, watch for scratching, and listen for any complaint about itching.
2. See your healthcare provider if a red, itchy rash is observed.
3. Report all cases of scabies to your child's school office.
4. Keep your child home until treated.

Scabies can be treated with any one of several creams or lotions (called scabicides). Apply medication in a thin even film from the chin down to the soles of the feet, covering all of the skin, not just the rash, because it is impossible to guess exactly where the mites are located. All of the body folds, the finger and toe webs, the armpits and genitals must be coated with medication. It is also important to spread it on the fingertips so that it gets under the nails.

Itching and rash usually improve after treatment but may not disappear completely for several days or weeks. This is because more time is required for the allergic reaction to subside, even though the mites are dead.

Medication should be removed by thorough bathing after the recommended time. Do not re-apply scabicide without instructions from your healthcare provider. These products are chemicals and can be harmful if applied too frequently or over long periods of time. It is important to follow these instructions carefully.

It is reasonable to launder bed linens, towels and underwear after treatment, but it is not necessary to clean outerwear, furniture, carpeting or toys. Mites survive for only 3 or 4 days off the human skin.

Your child may return to school the morning after he or she has been treated.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact your child's school office.