

Monday, 5 August 2024

## ISLHD responds to scabies outbreak

The Illawarra Shoalhaven Local Health District (ISLHD) is urging people who have been in contact with its health facilities to be on the lookout for the symptoms of scabies as it responds to an outbreak of the contagious skin condition.

An initial case of scabies was confirmed at Wollongong Hospital in late July and immediate steps were taken to limit transmission. The District is undertaking a thorough and extensive tracing process of both staff and patients and continues to contact people who may be directly impacted, or at higher risk of developing symptoms.

ISLHD Chief Executive Margot Mains said 11 patients and 23 staff have been diagnosed with scabies to date, which is impacting a number of wards across four ISLHD hospital sites – Wollongong, Coledale, Shellharbour and Bulli.

“Scabies is a common and very treatable condition. While it can be effectively managed in households, much like headlice, it can be difficult to contain especially in a hospital setting where patients are grouped together and there is a high transit level of staff between wards,” said Ms Mains.

“Because scabies has an incubation period of up to 6-8 weeks, is easily transmitted and can have minimal symptoms initially, there may be undetected cases within our facilities and community. To prevent the risk of further transmission, the District will provide preventative treatment for all current inpatients and staff across all our hospital sites and services,” she said.

ISLHD Executive Director Medical Services Dr Karen Murphy said patients discharged from hospital since mid-May are being urged to watch for symptoms and contact their GP should they develop an itchy rash.

“While scabies is usually treated effectively with no long-term complications, the condition can be unpleasant and requires treatment to kill the infestation,” Dr Murphy said.

### Scabies Facts

- Scabies is a treatable skin condition caused by a mite known as *Sarcoptes scabiei*, which leads to an itchy rash.
- It is usually spread through prolonged skin-to-skin contact or sometimes sharing bedding and towels, or direct handling of linen.
- Symptoms include an itchy rash, commonly found between the fingers and in skin folds.
- Itching is usually worse at night or after a hot bath or shower.

Further information about scabies can be found on the healthdirect website:

<https://www.healthdirect.gov.au/scabies#what-is>

Members of the community with questions about the scabies outbreak response can email the District on [ISLHD-HealthInformation@health.nsw.gov.au](mailto:ISLHD-HealthInformation@health.nsw.gov.au). The community can also phone healthdirect on 1800 022 222 for 24-hour health advice. Healthdirect has been briefed on the District’s scabies outbreak response.

**Illawarra Shoalhaven Local Health District**

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**healthdirect** AUSTRALIA – providing expert health advice 24 hours a day to NSW residents – Tel. 1800 022 222