

Scabies problem has retirement community scratching heads

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PORT CHARLOTTE: Fifty residents at a Port Charlotte retirement center have been infected by scabies. The Health Department and the nursing home are now taking steps to contain the bug.

Scabies is a mite that burrows into human skin - similar to lice. And fifty of the Royal Palm Retirement Center's 182 residents contracted the eight legged parasite.

The infection is highly contagious.

"Sanitation is very important and of course it's spread through contact personal contact," said Lincoln Lloyd of the Charlotte County Environmental Health Department.

The Health Department is still trying to find out how the bug got in. Officials we spoke to say it spread rapidly in unsanitary conditions.

They say best way to combat scabies is simple - practice good personal hygiene.

"A lot of times, scabies are transmitted from person to person or also contaminated towels, beddings and basically they are usually seen in poor hygienic conditions," said infectious disease Physician Mark Asperilla.

Health care physicians say it can be weeks before anyone knows if they've been infected. They urge folks who have visited a family member at the center to get checked by their doctor.

"The signs and symptoms are basically itching once their eggs are deposited on the skin the itching usually is at night that's where the itching starts when they deposit the fecal material on the skin," said Asperilla.

Officials with Royal Palm declined to go on camera, but issued a statement stating,

"They've cancelled group functions and activities and requested residents to stay in their rooms to minimize the chance of exposure... We will continue to make every effort to contain and minimize any chance of exposure among our residents".