



Dermatology Reports

<https://www.pagepress.org/journals/index.php/dr/index>

eISSN 2036-7406



Publisher's Disclaimer. E-publishing ahead of print is increasingly important for the rapid dissemination of science. **Dermatology Reports** is, therefore, E-publishing PDF files of an early version of manuscripts that undergone a regular peer review and have been accepted for publication, but have not been through the copyediting, typesetting, pagination and proofreading processes, which may lead to differences between this version and the final one.

The final version of the manuscript will then appear on a regular issue of the journal.

E-publishing of this PDF file has been approved by the authors.

Please cite this article as:

Zengarini C, Mussi M, Neri I, et al. Free access to medications for scabies treatment in Italy: a call to action and the need to evaluate its clinical and epidemiological impact. *Dermatol Rep* 2026 [Epub Ahead of Print] doi: 10.4081/dr.2026.10323

 © the Author(s), 2026
Licensee [PAGEPress](#), Italy

Received: 27 February 2026; Accepted: 16 March 2026.

Note: The publisher is not responsible for the content or functionality of any supporting information supplied by the authors. Any queries should be directed to the corresponding author for the article.

All claims expressed in this article are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of their affiliated organizations, or those of the publisher, the editors and the reviewers. Any product that may be evaluated in this article or claim that may be made by its manufacturer is not guaranteed or endorsed by the publisher.



Free access to medications for scabies treatment in Italy: a call to action and the need to evaluate its clinical and epidemiological impact

Corrado Zengarini,^{1,2} Martina Mussi,^{1,2} Iria Neri,¹ Valeria Gaspari,¹ Bianca Maria Piraccini,^{1,2} Giulia Rech,³ Salvatore Domenico Infusino,³ Michela Magnano,³ Laura Atzori,⁴ Riccardo Balestri³

¹Dermatology Unit, IRCCS Azienda Ospedaliero-Universitaria di Bologna; ²Department of Medical and Surgical Sciences, Alma Mater Studiorum University of Bologna; ³Division of Dermatology, Santa Chiara Hospital, Trento; ⁴Dermatologic Clinic, Department of Public Health, University of Cagliari, Italy

Correspondence: Dr. Martina Mussi, Department of Medical and Surgical Sciences, Alma Mater Studiorum University of Bologna, Via Massarenti, 1, 40138 Bologna, Italy. Tel.: +39 051-2144849. Fax: +39 051-2144867. E-mail: martina.mussi2@unibo.it

Key words: scabies; resistance; failure; treatment; therapy; free access.

Conflict of interest: the authors have no conflict of interest to declare.

Ethics approval and consent to participate: not applicable.

Availability of data and materials: data are available on request from the corresponding author.

Dear Editor,

The escalating spread of scabies, caused by the *Sarcoptes scabiei* mite, is a pressing and worrisome public health concern, with increasing worldwide incidence every year and frequent outbreaks,¹ making it not only an Italian problem but a global one. The World Health Organization (WHO) has identified several key actions to control scabies,² the most significant being the provision of funded therapies and their integration into universal health coverage programs. One major barrier to effectively managing this infectious disease is the cost of treatment, which limits access to care and worsens the spread, especially among economically disadvantaged groups. Specific studies on its impact on treatment failure are limited,³ and a recent study has proposed the development of a new scabies severity scoring system to better tailor therapeutic strategies based on the gravity of infestation, highlighting the need for a standardized clinical tool to optimize patient management and resource allocation.⁴ Above all, experts recognize cost as a significant factor influencing patient outcomes and treatment success. Moreover, this is not only a matter of public health necessity but also of equity, as the cost of treatment should never constitute a barrier to care, particularly for vulnerable populations, who are often the most exposed and disproportionately affected during outbreaks.

Scabies is classified as a neglected disease and is mainly prevalent among impoverished communities, migrants, and the low-income population. Therefore, availability of free medications is essential to prevent the uncontrolled spread of scabies, especially in healthcare facilities, schools, and other communal environments. Without access to affordable treatment, many individuals may delay or forgo care, leading to broader public health consequences.⁵

In response to this growing need, in Italy, the Autonomous Province of Trento and the Emilia-Romagna region have taken pioneering steps by providing ivermectin free of charge. To address a dramatic 482% increase in notified cases of scabies between 2022 and 2023 (unpublished data), the Province of Trento, through the Provincial Health Service (APSS), from April 2023, guarantees the provision of ivermectin both to infected individuals and their close contacts. Similarly, Emilia-Romagna has implemented measures to ensure that ivermectin, but also pyrethroid derivatives and benzyl benzoate, are dispensed under the Regional Health Service since July 2024, in order to face the increase in diagnoses recorded from 2013.⁶ Considering that scabies is a notifiable disease in Italy, including national epidemiological data (*e.g.*, annual cases reported in recent years) would strengthen awareness of the disease's spread and justify regional interventions.

Given the high economic cost of this initiative, it is essential to evaluate its impact through various indicators, primarily the therapeutic efficacy and control of the spread of infestations, but also to

assess the impact of providing free treatment. To address these issues, we started a national research protocol (SCAB-net), which is still ongoing at present. While ivermectin has been included in the 21st WHO Essential Medicines List, many countries, including ours, have not yet fully implemented this recommendation.

The SCAB-net protocol aims to address this gap by defining clear participation criteria and ensuring accessibility throughout Italy, laying the groundwork for structured, evidence-based intervention. In particular, SCAB-net is a multicentric observational study – both retrospective and prospective – that aims to collect standardized clinical data on scabies cases across various regions. Participation is open to all public dermatology services in Italy, with data collection conducted via the REDCap platform. The protocol includes both pediatric and adult patients and focuses on evaluating treatment efficacy, documenting resistant cases, and identifying risk factors for therapeutic failure.

We are writing to urgently advocate for the provision of free medications for the treatment of scabies, in line with WHO recommendations. The final objective of our letter is to share our experience and to provide an official document to actively urge health authorities and policymakers to consider similar programs to make scabies treatment accessible to everyone. Free access to medications like ivermectin represents not only an essential step in controlling scabies outbreaks but also a cost-effective public health strategy. It can help reduce the economic burden on healthcare systems, prevent secondary infections, and align with global health equity goals. Above all, it reinforces the moral obligation to protect the most vulnerable populations.

References

1. Donà MG, Giuliani E, Giglio A, et al. Increasing trend in confirmed scabies cases in the only public dermatological institute of scientific research and care in Italy. *Eur J Dermatol* 2023;33:709-10.
2. El-Moamly AA. Scabies as a part of the World Health Organization roadmap for neglected tropical diseases 2021-2030: what we know and what we need to do for global control. *Trop Med Health* 2021;49:64.
3. Mbuagbaw L, Sadeghirad B, Morgan RL, et al. Failure of scabies treatment: a systematic review and meta-analysis. *Br J Dermatol* 2024;190:163-73.
4. Neri I, Mussi M, Robuffo S, et al. Scabies severity score: the key to predicting and preventing treatment failures? *Clin Exp Dermatol* 2025;50:1446-7.
5. Heukelbach J, Mazigo HD, Ugbomoiko US. Impact of scabies in resource-poor communities. *Curr Opin Infect Dis* 2013;26:127-32.
6. Zengarini C, Mussi M, La Placa M, et al. Scabies increasing incidence in Bologna from 2013 to 2024: a retrospective analysis. *Sex Transm Infect* 2025;101:256-8.