



Factsheet: Pubic Lice (Crabs)

What are Pubic Lice?

Pubic Lice (also known as 'Crabs') are small parasites that feed on human blood. While crabs need blood to survive, they can live up to 24 hours away from a human body (e.g. on towels or sheets).

How is it transmitted?

Pubic Lice are usually found on pubic hair but can also be found on other areas of the body with coarse hair e.g. armpits, eyebrows, eyelashes and facial hair.

Sexual Transmission:

- Intimate/close body contact, where the crabs move from the pubic hair of one person to the pubic hair of another person.
- Full sexual intercourse/penetration is not necessary to transmit crabs.

Nonsexual Transmission:

Although rare, a person can get crabs from:

- sleeping in an infested bed or using infested towels.
- wearing infested clothing.

What are the symptoms?

- The most common symptom of crabs is itching in the pubic area and usually starts about five days after a person gets crabs.
- A person may be able to see individual crabs by looking closely or using a magnifying glass. The crabs may be whitish-grey or rust coloured.
- A person may also notice crab eggs, or nits, attached to the base of the hair.
- Dark or bluish spots can appear and last for several days in the infested area.

How is it diagnosed?

A visual examination by a nurse or doctor.

How is it treated?

- Specific creams, shampoos or lotions to treat the affected area(s).
- Clothes, bed linens, and sleeping bags must be washed in hot water (at least 130-degrees Fahrenheit), and dried on a hot cycle for at least 20 minutes.
- Items that cannot be washed can be placed in a plastic bag for two weeks or dry-cleaned to ensure decontamination.

Following treatment for Pubic Lice, a person can be re-infected if they are exposed to them again.



Prevention

- Although condoms do not provide protection against pubic lice, they are effective at preventing other STIs. When sexually active, always use condoms and/or dental dams for vaginal, anal and oral sex.
- Get checked, tested and treated if required.
- Make informed decisions: talk to sexual partner(s) about STI testing and using condoms, and get informed about the risks.
- Mutual monogamy (both partners test for STIs and don't have any, and both partners agree to only have sex with each other, and keep it that way!).

Join the Just Carry One Campaign and promote safer sex:

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