

# Fact Sheet

## Pubic Lice

### What are pubic lice?

Also called crab lice or "crabs," pubic lice are parasitic insects found primarily in the pubic or genital area of humans. Pubic lice are short and crab-like and look very different from head or body lice. Pubic lice infestation is diagnosed by finding a "crab" louse or eggs on hair in the pubic region or, less commonly, somewhere else on the body where there is hair (eyebrows, eyelashes, beard, armpit, legs, or scalp).

Lice found on the head generally are head lice, not pubic lice.

Animals do not get or spread pubic lice.

### What are the signs and symptoms of pubic lice?

Signs and symptoms of pubic lice include itching in the genital area and visible nits (lice eggs) or crawling lice.

### How is it spread?

Pubic lice usually are spread through sexual contact and are most common in adults. Pubic lice found on children may be a sign of sexual exposure or abuse. Occasionally, pubic lice may be spread by close personal contact or contact with articles such as clothing, bed linens, or towels that have been used by an infested person. Lice cannot survive very long away from a warm human body.

### How is a pubic lice infestation treated?

Lice-killing products are available without a prescription. These medications are safe and effective when used exactly according to the instructions in the package or on the label. Do not use near the eyes. Repeat treatment in 9–10 days if live lice are still found.

Following treatment, most nits will still be attached to hair shafts. Nits may be removed with fingernails or by using a fine-toothed comb.

Put on clean underwear and clothing after treatment.

To kill any lice or nits remaining on clothing, towels, or bedding - machine-wash and machine-dry those items that the infested person used during the 2–3 days before treatment. Use hot water and the hot dryer cycle. Items that cannot be washed can be dry-cleaned or stored in a sealed plastic bag for 2 weeks.

All sex partners from within the previous month should be informed that they are at risk for infestation and should be treated. Persons infested with pubic lice should be examined for the presence of other sexually transmitted diseases.

If additional treatment is needed for lice or nits on the eyebrows or eyelashes, special ointment is available from the health center. Regular Vaseline should not be used because it can irritate the eyes.

### Can pubic lice be prevented?

Pubic lice are spread by direct contact with an infested person, or occasionally through an infested person's clothing or bedding. To prevent the spread of public lice:

- Avoid sexual contact with people who have pubic lice. Infested people should avoid sexual contact with their sex partner(s) until both they and their partners have been successfully treated and checked to confirm the infestation is over.
- Do not share clothing, beds, bedding, and towels used by an infested person.
- Bathe regularly and change into clean clothes at least once a week.
- Machine wash and dry infested clothing and bedding using the hot water laundry cycle and the high heat drying cycle. Clothing and items that are not washable can be dry-cleaned OR sealed in a plastic bag and stored for 2 weeks.