

Pediculosis

Definition

- A six-legged louse which may invade the pubic hair region and infest it with their eggs.
- These **lice** can also infest axillary hair and eyebrows, but they are drawn to the pubic region.
- Pubic lice infestation, or crabs, is considered a sexually-transmitted disease.

Causes, Incidence, and Risk Factors

- Pubic lice are known scientifically as *Phthirus pubis*.
- Infestation is a common sexually-transmitted condition and is found mostly in adolescents.
- Transmission can occur through physical contact with contaminated objects or clothing such as toilet seats, sheets, and blankets.
- Infestation is preceded by moderate to severe itching (pruritus) in the area covered by pubic hair.

- This itch is frequently worse at night as the crab louse burrows into the hair follicle to feed.
- It excretes a substance into the skin that causes the itching.
- Sometimes the bite can cause an inflammatory skin reaction.
- The lice do not cause a rash, but the constant scratching may cause the skin to break and leave the individual prone to secondary infection.

- On close inspection, adult lice (1.2 mm in diameter) may be seen.
- Nits (eggs) can be seen at the base of the pubic hair.
- Although pubic lice appear to prefer the pubic area, they can also thrive on the eyelashes.

Risk factors include:

- being a “slut”
- having multiple sexual partners
- having sexual contact with an infected person
- sharing bedding or clothing with an infected person



Pubic Lice

Prevention

- **Don't be a SLUT!**
- Avoid sexual or intimate contact with infected people.
- If sexually active, use **safer sex behaviours** to avoid getting lice.
- Good personal hygiene is always recommended.
- If possible, avoid trying on bathing suits. However, if you must, be sure to wear your underwear while trying them on.

Symptoms

- itching in pubic hair region
- eggs (nits) or actual adult lice may be seen
- genital lesions
- other genital lesions consisting of scratched (excoriated) areas and possibly secondary infections

Signs and Tests

- An examination of the external genital region typically reveals small gray-white oval eggs (nits) attached to the hair shaft and may reveal adult lice.
- Scratch marks or signs of secondary infection such as impetigo may also be noted.

Treatment

- Pubic lice are treated with a prescription drug, gamma benzene hexachloride 1% shampoo.
- Comb the pubic hair with a fine-tooth comb to remove eggs (nits).
- A single treatment is all that is usually needed. If another treatment is recommended, it should be done 4 days to 1 week later.

- At the time of treatment, wash all clothing and linens in hot water.
- Items that cannot be washed may be sprayed with a pediculocidal spray or sealed in plastic bags and not used for 10 to 14 days.
- All sexual partners need to be treated simultaneously.
- Consider referral to STD clinic for further tests.

Prognosis

Adequate treatment, including environmental cleaning, should eradicate the lice.

Complications

Secondary infections may occur because of skin break-down from frequent scratching.