



Pubic Lice

What are pubic lice?

Pubic lice are tiny insects that live on body hair, usually in the pubic area. They are also called crabs or crab lice. Pubic lice can also be found in chest hair, armpit hair, on the upper thighs, lower abdomen, eyebrows, eyelashes, and facial hair.

How are they spread?

Pubic lice are spread by skin-to-skin contact with someone who has lice. Pubic lice cannot jump or fly. Pubic lice are most often spread through sexual contact, but may also spread by sharing clothing, bedding or towels of someone who has pubic lice. Condoms do not prevent the spread of pubic lice.

What are the symptoms?

Pubic lice cause severe itching. If pubic lice get on your eyelashes, the edges of your eyelids may be crusted. You may see lice and their eggs at the base of the eyelashes.

The itching can be worse at night. The bites may also become infected, causing irritation and painful swelling. Bites from the lice can cause a rash or small bluish spots on your skin. The spots may last for several months, even after all lice have been treated or killed.

You will also likely see tiny tan-coloured specks on your pubic hair that cannot be pulled off. These specks are the eggs laid by the lice called nits.

What is the treatment?

Pubic lice will not go away without treatment. Treatments for pubic lice include using a special lotion or shampoo to kill the eggs and lice. These can be purchased without a prescription. Follow the directions carefully.

If you have pubic lice on your eyebrows or eyelashes, do not use shampoos or lotions to treat them. Apply petroleum jelly (Vaseline®) to the eyebrow, eyelid and lashes 3 times a day for several days. For more information about these treatments, speak with your health care provider.

Your sexual partners need to be treated as well. Other people living in your home do not need treatment unless they have shared your clothes, bed or towels.

Contact a health care provider if the lice do not go away after the first treatment, or if you have any signs of a skin infection. Skin infections can be caused by frequent scratching.

What should I do with my clothes, bed sheets, and towels?

All clothes, bed sheets, towels and cloth toys that may have come into contact with pubic lice need to be washed with hot water or dry-cleaned. Use an automatic washing machine with water that is warmer than 54.5 °C (130 °F), or place items in a hot dryer for 30 minutes.

Woolen items may be ironed to kill lice and eggs.

Anything that cannot be washed in hot water or dry-cleaned should be put in a sealed airtight plastic bag for one week to kill the lice.

How can I reduce my chance of getting a sexually transmitted infection (STI)?

Practice safe sex by using a condom

When used as directed, male and female condoms help prevent the spread of many STIs, including HIV, during vaginal, anal and oral sex. Condoms are less effective at protecting against STIs transmitted by skin-to-skin contact, such as herpes simplex, genital warts (human papillomavirus or HPV), and syphilis.

Important things to remember when using condoms:

- Check the condom package for damage and to ensure the expiry date has not passed.
- Carefully open the package so that the condom does not tear.
- Keep condoms away from sharp objects such as rings, studs, or piercings.
- Store condoms at room temperature.
- A new condom should be used every time you have sex.
- Use only water-based lubricants with male latex condoms. Oil-based lubricants, such as petroleum jelly, lotion, or baby oil can weaken and destroy latex.
- Avoid using spermicides containing nonoxynol-9 (N-9). It irritates sexual tissue and may increase the chance of getting an STI.

Get vaccinated

Some STIs, such as hepatitis A, B and human papillomavirus (HPV) can be prevented with vaccines. Talk to your health care provider about how to get these vaccinations.

Know your sexual health status

If you have recently changed sexual partners, or have multiple sex partners, getting regularly tested for STIs will tell you if you have an infection. Finding and treating an STI, (including HIV) reduces the chances of passing the infection on to your partner.

The more partners you have, the more likely you are to be exposed to a sexually transmitted infection.

Talk about prevention

Talk to your partner about STIs and how you would like to prevent them before having sex. If you are having trouble discussing safer sex with your partner, talk about it with your health care provider or a counselor.

For tips on how to talk to your partner, visit the BC Centre for Disease Control (BCCDC) Smart Sex Resource at <http://smartsexresource.com/sex-talk/talk-about-it>.

Informing Partners

If you have a sexually transmitted infection and are sexually active, it is important to tell your sexual partners. This will enable them to make decisions about their health and getting tested.

For More Information

For more information on how you can reduce your chance of getting an STI, see [HealthLinkBC File #08o Preventing Sexually Transmitted Infections \(STIs\)](#).

For more HealthLinkBC File topics, visit www.HealthLinkBC.ca/healthfiles or your local public health unit.

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For deaf and hearing-impaired assistance, call 7-1-1 in B.C.

Translation services are available in more than 130 languages on request.



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