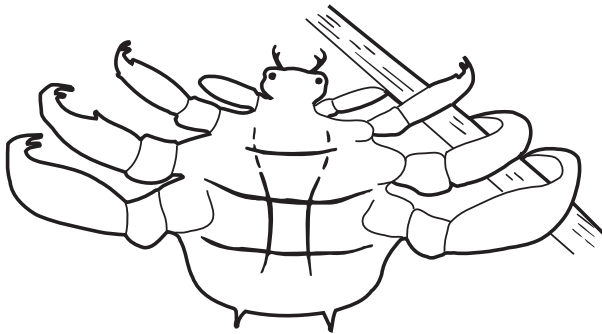


Lice: pubic lice

What are pubic lice?

Pubic lice or 'crabs' is caused by the pubic louse (or *crab-louse*), *Pthirus pubis*. These insects are usually found tightly attached to the hairs of the pubic region, less commonly to the hairs of the legs, the underarms or the beard. They suck blood as their food while clinging to pubic hair. In young children the lice can occasionally be found on the eyelashes or on the hair of the forehead. Their eggs (nits) are attached to the hair shaft after being laid. The lice live for about 3 weeks.

Pubic lice don't voluntarily leave the body.



A crablouse attached to a hair shaft (actual size is 1 to 2 mm)

How are they spread?

Crablice are transmitted by close personal contact, especially during sexual intercourse. They may rarely be transmitted to young children by contact with heavily infested parents.

What are the symptoms?

There may be no symptoms, but the infestation or itching may be the main complaint. Small red sores may be seen. The pubic area may have a musty smell.

How is it diagnosed?

Diagnosis is made by finding eggs or lice tightly applied to the hair shaft. The lice may be seen to move like crabs, but usually are seen as rust-coloured specks in the pubic hair.

What is the treatment?

Topical medication

The treatment of choice is permethrin 1% liquid or pyrethrins 0.165% with piperonyl butoxide 2% in a foam base. The skin should be cool, clean and dry when permethrin liquid is applied. Lindane 1% lotion and maldison 0.5% lotion are also effective.

Where should it be applied?

Apply to the affected hair only. This is usually confined to the pubic hair. Leave for 10 minutes then brush off, or for 12 hours, according to instructions on the package.

Where the lice or their eggs are attached to eyelashes, insecticides should not be used; cure can be achieved by the liberal application of Vaseline to the lashes (twice daily for 8 days).

Note:

- Shaving the pubic hair may help but it is not essential.
- Comb the pubic hair with a lice comb to remove nits.

How often?

Repeat the treatment in 7 to 10 days. Sometimes a third treatment is necessary.

Persistent itch

The itch may continue after treatment. Check with your doctor who may prescribe an anti-itch preparation.

Clothing and bedding

Any towels, bedclothes and underwear used in the last 2 days of treatment should be washed normally in hot water after treatment and hung in the sun to dry.

Contacts

Sexual contacts and the family must be treated. Young children can be infested from heavily infested parents.