



# HEALTH UPDATE

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## Pubic Lice

### Description

- Pubic lice, most commonly known as “crabs” because that’s what they look like under a microscope, are caused by a louse, *pthirus pubis*. On your body they are the color and size of a tiny light freckle, about 1 mm in length, and practically invisible to the naked eye.
- Crabs are parasites, generally found in the pubic areas of the body, but may also be found in the underarms, on eyelashes, on moustaches, and rarely on scalp and other body hair.
- In all stages of their life cycle, crab lice feed frequently on human blood. The adult female lays about four eggs (nits) per day. These are glued to hairs. The young emerge 7 – 10 days later, after being incubated by body heat, and must feed on blood within about 24 hours in order to survive.

### Symptoms

- Intense itching in the pubic area, especially at night.
- Tiny, brick-red specks (feces) usually on underwear or sheets, but sometimes on skin as well.
  - Tiny white, oval, shiny attachments stuck near the base of pubic hairs; these are the eggs, and are not to be confused with hair follicles.

### Causes

- Pubic lice are most commonly spread through close body contact, such as occurs during sexual contact.
- Though less common, someone may also get crab lice after sleeping in a bed or sleeping bag used by a person who has pubic lice, or by wearing infected clothing.

- **Treatment**

- Don't panic – there are many available products which will provide a simple, inexpensive and effective cure.
- Some over-the-counter, non-prescription products include RID, A-200 and Nix. These are liquids which you apply to the affected areas, leave on for several minutes, then wash off. Whichever product you use, it is extremely important that you carefully follow the accompanying instructions and that you are thorough.
- Another alternative is to get a prescription for a medicated shampoo that you can purchase at the Student Health pharmacy.
- Retreatment 7-10 days after initial treatment is often recommended.
- If eyelashes are infested, use petrolatum ointment, applied twice daily for up to 8-10 days; nits should be removed mechanically from the eyelashes with a nit comb.
- Sexual partners should also be treated at the same time.
- Pregnant women should consult their health care provider before treatment.

## **Preventing Reinfestation**

- To prevent reinfestation, it is also important that all clothing, bedding and towels be washed with detergent and hot water then dryer dried. Drycleaning is also effective.
- Thoroughness is the key; do not omit any clothing, bedding or towels that you have used in recent weeks.
- If you are also worried about upholstery, mattresses, blankets and carpets, a thorough cleaning and vacuuming is generally sufficient.

## **When To Be Concerned**

- Crab lice are often spread through sexual contact and therefore may accompany other sexually transmitted infections. If you should notice genital sores, swollen glands, painful urination, unusual vaginal discharge, pelvic pain, other marked physical problems, or if you wish to be screened for other sexually transmitted infections, consult your health care provider.