

Crabs (Pubic Lice)

Description

Crabs, also known as pubic lice, are round, grayish, crab-like, 1-2 mm long (about the size of a pin-head) parasites with a segmented body and claws for clinging to hairs. They belong to a family of insects called biting lice, which also include head lice. Although crabs come from the same family of parasites as head and body lice, they are not the same thing. Crabs live in pubic hair and occasionally in the hair of the chest, armpits, eyelashes, and eyebrows.

Crab lice thrive in warm conditions. They nourish themselves by drinking the blood of their host. Their life-span is about one month but they lay many eggs which reproduce several generations before they die.

Without a human host, they only survive for about 24 hours. However, they may deposit eggs that can take up to 7 days to hatch in bedding or towels. Once hatched, a crab louse will make its way onto the pubic hair and lay eggs. The eggs are cemented onto individual hairs, close to the skin and can be seen with the naked eye.

Symptoms

Symptoms may include:

- Inflammation of the pubic area or other infested area
- Intense itching and an uncomfortable rash
- There may also be visible small specks on the base of pubic hairs or in underwear

NOTE: SYMPTOMS MAY VARY FROM PERSON TO PERSON.

Transmission

SEXUAL TRANSMISSION:

- Most cases of crabs are transmitted through sexual contact, when the crabs move from the pubic hair of one person to the pubic hair of another
- Even when there is no sexual penetration, you can get crabs or transmit crabs to someone else
- You can get crabs whenever some part of your body that has coarse hair (such as the pubic area, eyelashes, eyebrows, facial hair, chest, or armpits) comes into contact with the infested pubic or other coarse hair
- Crabs do not usually attach to head hair

NONSEXUAL TRANSMISSION:

- Sleeping in an infested bed or using infested towels
- Wearing infested clothing
- An infested toilet seat, though this is rare

Diagnosis

A diagnosis is made by finding a "crab" louse or an egg (nit) on hair in the pubic region or, less commonly, elsewhere on the body (eyebrows, eyelashes, beard, mustache, armpit, perianal area, groin, trunk, scalp). See a health care provider for a diagnosis.

Treatment

- Over the counter medications such as NIX or RID are quite effective. Prescription lotions or creams are also available for topical application (e.g., Kwell). **CHECK WITH YOUR MEDICAL PROVIDER IN ADVANCE FOR THE BEST TREATMENT.** The lotion is applied, left on for a certain period of time, and washed off.

Treatment (Continued on page 2)

Treatment (Continued from page 1)

- If desired, nits can be removed after loosening them from the hair shaft with vinegar
- It is not necessary to shave the pubic hair
- Clothing and linen should be disinfected by washing them in hot water, by dry cleaning them, or by removing them from human exposure for 1 to 2 weeks. **CLOTHING AND LINEN SHOULD NOT BE SHARED**
- **AVOID SEXUAL OR CLOSE PHYSICAL CONTACT UNTIL AFTER TREATMENT**

Prevention

- Crabs can be spread through sexual contact as well through contact with an infested towel, sheet, toilet seat, etc. Therefore, abstaining from any sexual activity is the best method for preventing transmission.
- If crabs are present, it is advisable to have a general check-up to make sure no other diseases have been contracted.
- All sexual partners and those with close physical contact should be checked to see if they need treatment.

For More Information:

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| Student Health Services | 619-594-5281 | Facebook/Twitter | Facebook.com/aztechealth & |
| Health Promotion. | 619-594-4133 | | @AZTEChalth |
| Visit Our Website at | shs.sdsu.edu | American Social Health Association (ASHA) | |
| | | National STD Hotline. | .800-227-8922 |