

CRABS

Other name: Pubic Lice

What is it?

Crabs are small grey or brownish-red insects that live mostly in pubic hair. Sometimes they live in chest hair, armpit hair, on eyelashes or eyebrows. Crabs lay their eggs at the base of a hair where they are firmly attached. These eggs are called nits. It usually takes 6-10 days for the eggs to hatch into crabs. Crabs live by feeding on human blood. They can live for 24 – 48 hours away from the body, for example, on bed sheets.

How is it spread?

A person can get crabs through close contact with an infected person. This can happen during sexual contact, or by sharing the same bed. Sometimes, they can spread through contact with infested bed linens, towels and clothing. They are rarely spread by contact with a toilet seat.

What are the symptoms?

The most common symptom is itching in the pubic area, especially at night. Some people do not get itchy. They may find crabs or nits in their pubic hair; or they may find tiny dried spots of blood on their underwear. Some people notice bluish spots in their pubic area or on their thighs where the crabs bit them. Sometimes these symptoms appear right away. However, if it is a mild case, a person may not notice for a few weeks.

How is it diagnosed?

A person may look through their pubic hair and find crabs or they may see nits. Finding nits means a person has crabs.

What are the complications?

Scratching can lead to a skin infection.

How is it treated?

Ordinary soap and water will not kill crabs or nits. Pharmacies have over the counter creams and shampoos containing permethrin or pyrethrins. These include Nix, Lice-Enz and R&C shampoo. When used as directed, it is safe to use these treatments on infants, children, pregnant or breast-feeding women.
(please turn over)

Fact Sheet

It is important to follow directions so that the treatment is not absorbed into the body. Infants, children, pregnant and breast-feeding women should not use products that contain lindane. Kwellada is a common brand of lice treatment that contains lindane. A pharmacist can help to choose the right treatment and explain how to use it properly.

Dry clean or wash infested clothing, linens and towels with hot water and dry at a hot setting. Vacuum sofas, mattresses and rugs to get rid of crabs and nits. If there are some things that cannot be washed, they can be put into plastic bags and sealed for a few days. Crabs will die in 24 – 48 hours if they cannot feed from a human body.

What about sexual partners?

All sexual partners from the previous month should be informed and treated for crabs. Avoid sexual contact until you and your partner have been treated successfully. It is important for people who live in the same home to check for crabs. If they have crabs, they need to be treated.

Is follow-up important?

Follow-up is not necessary unless a person gets re-infected or has a skin infection from scratching.

Remember:

- Follow the instructions that come with the treatment.
- Itching may not stop until a few days after treatment.
- Clean all infested clothing, bed linens and towels with hot water; vacuum other household items.
- You may need to be retreated in 9-10 days if live crabs are still found.
- Inform sexual partners(s) and household members. Tell them to check for crabs and nits. Sexual partners should be treated.
- Use condoms to lower the chance of getting Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) including HIV.

**For more information
call the AIDS and Sexual Health InfoLine at 416-392-2437**

SAFER SEX

*To reduce your risk of getting a sexually transmitted infection (STI),
use a condom every time you have vaginal, anal or oral sex.*

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