

## Pubic Lice (Crabs)

Pubic lice are small, crab-like insects that are grey or brown-red. They live in pubic hair, but can be on other body parts with hair (e.g., chest, armpit, face, eyelashes).

Crabs can live for up to 24 hours on bedding, towels, and clothes. They feed on the blood of the infected person (by taking small bites that can cause itching). They lay tiny white eggs (nits) that stick on the hair shaft. Crabs don't have wings, so they can't jump or fly.

### How do I get crabs?

You can get crabs by:

- having skin-to-skin contact with a person who has crabs
- sharing clothes, towels, bedding, or sleeping bags with a person who has crabs

### How do I know I have crabs?

- You can see pubic lice or nits on the hair and skin around the genitals and anus.
- You might get itching in the pubic area and around the genitals and the anus. Itching is often worse at night.
- You may get redness and pain from scratching, which can spread lice to other body hair. Bite marks look like small, blue spots on the skin. You may see fine, black specks in your underwear.

If you think you have crabs, see a nurse or doctor.

### How do I get rid of crabs?

#### ***On the Body:***

- Regular soap or shampoo does **not** kill crabs. Shaving may not get rid of crabs either.
- Use special shampoos/creams with medicine (you can buy these at a drugstore without a prescription). Follow package directions or ask your pharmacist. Put lotion on all body parts with hair, except the head.
- After treatment, use a fine-toothed comb to remove any eggs still in body hair. Wash your hands and put on clean clothes after treatment.
- You may need more than 1 treatment. If you still have symptoms after being treated, repeat the treatment 7 days later.

- Your sexual partner and anyone you have shared a bed, towels, or clothes with needs to be treated at the same time.
- Talk to a nurse or doctor before you use the shampoo or cream if you are pregnant, breastfeeding, or treating a child under 2.

### ***In the Home:***

- You must treat all clothes, towels, and bedding used during treatment **and** any unwashed items used 2 to 3 days before treatment. To do this, wash all items in hot water (50 °C) and put them in a dryer for at least 20 minutes on the hottest setting. If any items can't be washed, have them dry-cleaned or loosely pack them in a sealed plastic bag. Put the bag in the freezer for 2 to 7 days.
- Vacuum mattresses, pillows, rugs, beds, and furniture.

### **For More Information**

- STI/HIV Information Line: 1-800-772-2437
- [www.myhealth.alberta.ca](http://www.myhealth.alberta.ca)
- [www.sexgerms.com](http://www.sexgerms.com)



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