

PUBLIC HEALTH FACT SHEET



COUNTY MICHIGAN
HEALTH DIVISION

Department of Health & Human Services

oakgov.com/health

Pubic Lice

What are Pubic Lice?

Pubic Lice are tiny insects that look like small crabs. Pubic lice are also called crab lice. Because of their skin-like color and small size, they may be practically invisible to the naked eye. These tiny lice infest the hairy areas of the human body. Usually, they infest the pubic or genital area, but they may also infest underarms, eyelashes, and even moustaches. When the eyelashes are affected, the eyelids may become inflamed. The crab louse does not normally infest the hair on the head.

Who can get Pubic Lice?

Anyone can.

What are the symptoms?

You may have a severe itch in the genital area. You may also notice brown specks (dried blood spots) on your underwear. Clusters of nits, and possibly lice, may be seen on pubic hair. Nits are tiny, grayish-white, teardrop-shaped eggs of lice. They may be attached to the hair shaft, often close to the skin, or get into the seams of clothing.

How do you get Pubic Lice?

Pubic Lice are most commonly spread through close physical contact, usually sexual. Though unlikely, they can be spread to another person during nonsexual contact, such as through use of or contact with infested clothing, towels, and beds. It is very unlikely pubic lice is spread from toilet seats.

How long is the person contagious?

As long as lice or nits are present.

Are there complications?

Secondary skin infections may occur from scratching. Pubic lice do not spread illness or disease.

Is there a treatment for Pubic Lice?

Yes, there are non-prescription and prescription pubic lice products available through drugstores or local health departments. Oakland County Health Division does not endorse any specific brand or product. These products must be used only when pubic lice are present.

OVER



What to do if Pubic Lice is suspected?

1. Use a pubic lice treatment purchased at a drugstore or call your health care provider.
2. A second treatment may be required, follow the pubic lice treatment package directions.
3. All nits must be removed from the hair. Put removed nits directly in a trash container.
4. Sexual partners or other possible household contacts should be checked for pubic lice and treated if lice or nits are present.

Individual treatment steps

1. Take a hot soapy bath or shower using liberal amounts of soap.
2. Dry skin thoroughly.
3. Apply pubic lice treatment to affected area according to package directions.
4. Set timer or alarm clock to allow product to remain on the infested area for the time indicated in the package directions, but no longer.
5. Rinse out pubic lice product thoroughly.
6. Towel dry with a clean towel (not the one used before treatment).
7. A fine-tooth comb or a special lice/nit removing comb may be used to help remove lice or their eggs (nits) from hair.
8. Put on freshly laundered clothing.

Cleaning steps

1. All clothing, bedding (sheets, pillowcases, mattress pads, blankets, spreads), towels, and washcloths should be washed in hot water and soap and dried in a hot dryer for 20 minutes or dry-cleaned.
2. Anything that cannot be laundered or dry-cleaned may be put in a plastic bag for 2 weeks and kept at room temperature. If nits are present, they will hatch and die.
3. Vacuum the mattress before remaking the bed.

NOTE: DO NOT APPLY TO EYELASHES. SEE YOUR DOCTOR FOR TREATMENT.

For more information on Pubic Lice, call (248) 858-1406 or toll free 1 (800) 848-5533.

For additional copies, visit our website at www.oakgov.com/health or contact: