

Scabies, Lice, & Crabs

Pubic lice (often called "crabs") and scabies (itch mites) are tiny insects that live on the skin. They are sometimes spread sexually qualifying them as a sexually transmitted infection (STI), but you can also pick them up by using the same bed linen, clothes, or towels as an infected person. Pubic lice infect hairy parts of the body, especially around the groin and under the arms. Scabies cause an itchy rash, as the result of a female mite burrowing into a person's skin to lay her eggs.

PREVALENCE

Every year, millions of people experience infections from pubic lice or scabies.

TRANSMISSION

Pubic lice and scabies are transmitted through contact with an infested area on another person or through contact with infested materials such as sheets, towels, undergarments, or hairbrushes. Lice may live away from the body on these materials up to 2 days and eggs live up to 6 days.

SYMPTOMS

Although some people infected with pubic lice have no symptoms, you may experience considerable itching around the genitals. You may see light-brown insects the size of a pinhead moving on the skin or oval eggs attached to your body hair. The main symptom of scabies is itching, especially at night. You may also see burrows under the skin or a rash may appear in the folds of skin between the fingers or on the wrists, elbows, abdomen, or genitals.

After you are exposed to pubic lice or scabies, it may be 2 to 6 weeks before symptoms are evident. Fortunately, itchy and annoying is about all these lice and mites are. They are not carriers of other STIs or infections. Once you and anyone that you have close contact with have been successfully treated, you should be free of these parasites.

DIAGNOSIS

If you think you may have pubic lice or scabies, see your medical provider. They will visually examine your pubic hair for signs of adult lice, lice eggs (nits), or mites. If you have a scabies infection, your medical provider may also take a skin scraping, looking for mite eggs and/or fecal matter, to confirm the diagnosis. Your medical provider can then determine whether or not you need to seek treatment.

TREATMENT

The treatment is fairly simple. A medical provider will prescribe a medicated lotion, cream or shampoo that will be applied to the infested area. The most effective treatments include shampoos and creams that contain Lindane. Follow the directions carefully. The infestation may be stubborn, and you may need to repeat the treatment.

Wash your clothes and bed linens in hot water, and dry-clean them or press them with a very hot iron. Vacuum your mattress and bed. Avoid close contact with others and be sure to tell your sex partner(s). Anyone that you have had close contact with or who has shared your bed linens, clothes, or towels should be treated, even if they do not have an itch or rash.

SCHEDULING AN APPOINTMENT

The University Health Service (UHS) offers a full range of health care services for men and women. You can schedule an appointment with your primary care provider (PCP) by calling 275-2662. Women can also schedule an appointment with one of the women's health nurse practitioners. All visits to UHS are confidential.

LINKS

For more information about pubic lice, scabies, or crabs you can visit:

CDC - lice

http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dpd/parasites/lice/factsht_public_lice.htm

CDC - scabies

http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dpd/parasites/scabies/factsht_scabies.htm

ASHA

<http://www.ashastd.org/stdfaqs/crabs.html>