



PUBIC LICE and SCABIES

Pubic Lice

Pubic lice, also known as *crabs*, are parasites that attach to body hair, often in the pubic area. They can also be found in chest, armpit and facial hair, eyebrows and eyelashes. The lice are the size of a pencil dot and are greyish brown in color, making it difficult to see with the naked eye. Lice will lay their eggs at the base of the hair; these nits (eggs) are white or tan in color. Symptoms may appear two to six weeks after infestation.

The following symptoms can be present:

- Severe itching that can be worse at night
- Skin irritation, redness, and inflammation
- Small blue spots can appear where the lice have bitten
- Visible eggs or lice

Scabies

Scabies are mites that infest the skin; they are invisible to the naked eye. Female scabies will lay eggs under the surface of the skin. Symptoms may appear two to six weeks after infestation.

The following symptoms can be present:

- Severe itching, especially at night
- Skin irritation, redness and inflammation that usually appear between fingers and toes, wrist, underarm and the genital area.

How are pubic lice/scabies infestations diagnosed?

Infestations are diagnosed by a doctor or a nurse practitioner after examining the skin and hearing about the symptoms you are experiencing.

How is pubic lice/scabies treated?

- You can treat pubic lice and scabies at home with medicated lotions, creams or shampoos that are available at the drug store without a prescription.
- Ask the pharmacist for assistance and follow all the instructions carefully.
- Seek medical attention if symptoms persist after two treatments.
- All sexual partners, family and other people who have come into close body contact with you will need to be examined and treated.
- Any clothes, bed linen or towels used in the 2-3 weeks prior to having symptoms must be dry-cleaned or washed in hot soapy water. If dry cleaning is not possible, place them in a closed plastic bag and store them away for two weeks.
- Carpets, mattresses and furniture should be vacuumed thoroughly.

Can I give pubic lice or scabies to other people?

Pubic lice and scabies can be transmitted during sexual activity or other skin-to-skin contact. They may also spread by sharing clothing, towels or bedding with someone who is infested. Condoms do not prevent the spread.

When can I have sex again?

Sexual activity can be resumed when there are no sign or symptoms and sexual partners have been treated.

For more information, please consult:

Sexual Health Centre

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