

PUBIC LICE INFECTION

WHAT ARE PUBIC LICE?

Pubic lice or crab lice infest pubic hair, and sometimes also hair of the armpit, eyebrows, eyelashes, beard and torso. The infection is also called pediculosis pubis, and the lice are called *Phthirus pubis*. Lice infestation causes no serious harm, but is a warning that you should be tested for other sexually transmitted infections.

HOW ARE THEY TRANSMITTED?

Pubic lice are usually sexually transmitted through skin-to-skin contact.

WHAT ARE THE SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS?

The main symptom is itching of the affected area. This is often worse at night. Lice and nits (eggs from the lice) can sometimes be seen, especially at the base of hairs. Some people have no symptoms and are unaware of the lice.

HOW IS INFECTION DIAGNOSED?

Pubic lice are diagnosed by careful inspection of the affected area.

HOW ARE PUBIC LICE TREATED?

Topical creams or lotions are usually used. At Melbourne Sexual Health Centre we usually use permethrin 5% (Lyclear cream or Quellada lotion).

- Usually the whole body from neck to toes should be treated. Apply the cream and leave it on overnight. It can be washed off the next morning. You usually don't need to apply the cream to head hair.
- Wash clothing and bedding at the same time (machine washing and drying is sufficient).
- Sexual partners should be treated at the same time.
- Shaving pubic hair can be helpful.

• Permethrin should not be applied to the eyelashes. If this area is affected, discuss an alternative treatment with your doctor, such as using petroleum jelly.

• The treatment should be repeated after two weeks as it is not effective against un-hatched nits. Avoid close personal contact until you are treated. Symptoms may take a few days to settle, but if you still have symptoms one week later you should see your doctor for review.

SHOULD MY SEXUAL PARTNERS ALSO BE TREATED?

YES, Sexual partners from the last month should be examined and treated.

ARE PUBIC LICE THE SAME AS HEAD LICE?

Pubic lice do not tend to infect head hair. A different type of louse is generally responsible for this infection.

This fact sheet is designed to provide you with information on Pubic Lice. It is not intended to replace the need for a consultation with your doctor. All clients are strongly advised to check with their doctor about any specific questions or concerns they may have. Every effort has been taken to ensure that the information in this pamphlet is correct at the time of printing.