



INFECTION PREVENTION AND CONTROL

Body Lice (*Pediculosis capitus*) and Pubic Lice (*Pediculosis coporis*) **Patient Information**

What are body and pubic lice?

Lice are tiny insects that bite and feed on human blood. There are three different types of lice: head, body and pubic lice. Eggs (nits) are laid on body hairs or clothing fibers. The eggs hatch 7-10 days later. If they fall off a person, they die within 1-2 days.

Body lice are tiny insects that live in the seams and folds of clothing for up to 1 month. They are bigger than other types of lice. Pubic lice are tiny insects that lay eggs in the pubic hair area. These lice can also be found in armpit hair and eyebrows.

How do people get lice?

You can get body or pubic lice if you come in close contact with a person who has lice or touch the clothing or bedding of someone who has lice.

You are more likely to get body lice if you do not bathe and wash your clothes often or live in close (overcrowded) conditions. Pubic lice are often spread during sexual activity. Rarely, pubic lice can be passed through contact with objects such as sheets, blankets, or bathing suits.

How do lice make people sick?

Lice can cause allergic reactions that show up as an itchy rash. Intense itching leads to scratching which can cause sores and infection of the skin. Body lice have been known to transmit other diseases.

What are the symptoms of lice infestation?

Intense itchiness around the waist, under the arms, and places where clothing is tighter (body lice) or in the area covered by pubic hair (pubic lice). Small, red bumps are found in the affected area which may become crusty and ooze after scratching. Tiny white specks (eggs) that are hard to get off may be found on the bottom of each hair.

Can infestations with lice be treated?

Body lice: Regular bathing and changes and cleaning of clothes is the only treatment needed for body lice infestations.

Pubic lice: A single treatment with a pubic lice medicine may be offered. After applying the medicine, eggs have to be picked off of the hair before they hatch.

Check for lice close to the skin using a bright light and a magnifying glass, if available. Look for:

	Lice	Nits (eggs)
Size	Size of a sesame seed, flat, insects	Size of a grain of sand, oval
Colour	Grayish-brown color	Brownish color, when alive (whitish when dead)
How found	Crawling	Glued to the hair, very close to skin

Removal of the eggs can be done with a fine-toothed nit comb or fingernails. Pull the nits from the hair strands starting at the root and pulling right down to the tips. Wipe the nits on a tissue, place them in a closed garbage bag, and wash your hands and the comb with soap and water.

What does the Hospital do to prevent the spread of lice?

If you are found to have lice you may be moved to a private room, and you will be on contact precautions. While you have lice, you will be asked to stay in your room; however, you may still have visitors. We will ask your visitors to clean their hands when they enter and leave your room. Visitors and everyone entering your room to provide care will need to wear a gown and gloves.

What special precautions are needed for lice at home?

Check all close contacts. If one person in the family or house has lice, it is possible others may also have lice. If you have received the treatments and still notice live lice more than 48 hours later, contact your Doctor.

Wash all clothing and bedding in hot water (at least 130°F, 55°C) then machine dry using hot cycle. Items that cannot be washed may be sprayed with a medicated spray that you can buy at a drug store. You can also seal items in plastic bags for 14 days to smother lice.

If you have questions about the information in this document, contact Queensway Carleton Hospital's Infection Prevention and Control at 613-721-2000, ext. 3777 or Ottawa Public Health:

<https://www.ottawapublichealth.ca/en/public-health-topics/diseases.aspx>