



Royal Berkshire
NHS Foundation Trust

Crabs (pubic lice)

Information for patients

This leaflet is for people who have been diagnosed with crabs (pubic lice). It explains how crabs may be contracted and how they are treated.

What are crabs?

Crabs (pubic lice) are small insects, which can live in body hair. They can be found in pubic hair, underarm hair, chest hair, on hairy legs and sometimes in beards. More rarely they may be seen on eyebrows and eyelashes. They are different to head lice but are usually treated with the same medication.

Crabs live by sucking blood and lay eggs that stick on the hairs. After they have hatched, the egg case (called a 'nit') shows as a brown dot stuck to the hair.

How can I tell if I have crabs?

- You may have itching from an allergic (hypersensitivity) reaction to the bites.
- You may see the crabs themselves or the egg cases (nits). The crabs are very small (about 2mm long) and yellow-grey coloured.
- You may notice a fine black powder in your pants. This is the crabs' droppings. Sometimes there are small specks of blood as well.
- Blue spots on your skin (caused by lice bites).
- Sometimes there are no symptoms.

How can I get crabs?

They are passed on by close body contact, especially sexual contact. Using condoms does not protect you from crabs. It is also possible for them to be spread through sharing bedding, towels or clothing. They

do not fly or jump, and can't be caught from hard surfaces such as toilet seats.

How are they treated?

- You can treat pubic lice yourself at home by using a special type of lotion, cream or shampoo that you may be given. You can also buy this lotion from the chemist. The treatment is applied to all the hairy areas on your body, except for the hair on your head, eyebrows and eyelashes. It usually needs to be repeated after 3 to 7 days. Make sure that you fully understand the instructions.
- If your eyelashes are infested you will need different treatment for that area.
- Sexual partners from the last 3 months should also be treated *at the same time* as should anyone else who has shared your bed. They will need to visit their GP or buy the lotion from a chemist.
- Nits, or lice eggs, can survive off the body for several days. It is therefore possible to be infected (or re-infected) by wearing unwashed, infected clothes or sleeping in a previously used bed so make sure you wash clothes, bedding and towels at the time of treatment.
- Dead nits may remain stuck to the hair for weeks afterwards and these can be removed if necessary using a special comb.
- Avoid sexual or close skin contact until the treatment is complete for you and your partner.
- *It is a good idea to have a sexual health check-up in case you have caught any other infection.*

If you have any questions or worries, please ask to speak to a health adviser, either in the clinic or by telephoning 0118 322 7202.

Contraception (25s and under) & Sexual Health (all ages) Drop-in Clinics – no appointment needed

Department of Sexual Health
Florey and Contraceptive Services
21A Craven Road
Reading RG1 5LE
Tel: 0118 322 7202
www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk/sexualhealth
www.safesex.berkshire.nhs.uk

Except for public holidays, the clinic is open:

Monday to Friday 7am – 7pm.

Saturday 9.30 am – 11.30 am.

The clinic is closed on Thursday between 8am – 9am for staff training.

Newbury Sexual Health
Clinic
West Berkshire Community
Hospital
Benham Hill
Thatcham RG18 3AS
9.30am – 11.30am on
Saturdays (excluding those
with a public holiday).



We will endeavour to see everyone. However, if between 6pm and 7pm attendance is high, we may ask you to return the next day.

Consistent use of condoms will reduce your risk of catching most STIs.

This document can be made available in other languages and formats upon request.

References

British Association of Sexual Health and HIV:

Guidelines on the management of *Phthirus Pubis* infestation (2008)

Dept. of Sexual Health, March 2017

Review due: March 2019