

What are pubic lice?

Pubic lice (commonly called crabs) are small insects that can live in the pubic hair and/or coarse hair elsewhere on the body of both males and females.

How do you get pubic lice?

Pubic lice is spread during close skin to skin contact, usually during sexual contact. Occasionally, pubic lice may be spread by sharing clothing or bed linens with a person who is infested.

Can you protect yourself from pubic lice?

Yes. The best ways to avoid pubic lice are:

- No sex (abstinence).
- No drugs (including alcohol), which can impair your judgment prior to sex.

If you are having sex:

- Limit your number of sex partners.
- Use a latex condom correctly each time you have sex. Pubic lice may be found in areas that a condom does not cover (i.e. the thigh).
- Talk to your partners about testing and condom use.

What are the symptoms of pubic lice?

When symptoms are present, they may include:

- Slight to severe itching.
- Small red bumps in the pubic area.
- Pinhead sized white eggs that stick to the pubic hair and hair on the upper legs.
- Lice (tiny crab-like bugs that can be seen in the pubic hair and hair on the upper legs).
- Discolored skin patches and scratch marks in the pubic area.

You should call your health care provider or the Guilford County Department of Public Health right away if:

- You have any of these symptoms.
- You have had sex with someone who has pubic lice or shows any of the above symptoms.

Are pubic lice dangerous?

No. However, without treatment, swollen glands, rashes and skin infections may occur.

How do you treat pubic lice?

Medicated cream rinses, lotions and shampoos are used to treat and cure pubic lice. Treatments are available without a prescription at drug stores. Ask your pharmacist which treatment is best for you.

Make sure that sheets, towels and clothing worn next to the skin are washed in hot water with detergent. Anyone you're having sex with needs to be checked by a health care provider or the Guilford County Department of Public Health. Call 641-7777 in Greensboro or High Point.

Can you still have sex?

You should not have sex or close physical contact until you have finished your treatment and the lice are gone.

For more information, contact the Guilford County Department of Public Health at 641-7777 or visit our website at www.guilfordhealth.org