

Auckland Sexual Health Service
Free phone 0800 739 432

What are pubic lice (Crabs)?

- Pubic lice are tiny parasites, which can cause itching in the genital area.
- The lice use their claws to grab and hang on to pubic hairs while feeding on blood.

Who can get pubic lice and how is it spread?

- Pubic lice are common and anyone can get them.
- Having close bodily contact with another person who is infected spreads pubic lice.
- Pubic Lice can survive for some time away from the body so it is also possible to catch them by sharing clothes or someone else's bed.

What are the symptoms of pubic lice?

- The main symptom of pubic lice is itching in the pubic or groin area.
- This itching is due to the pubic lice biting and causing irritation.
- Often they can be seen moving in the pubic hair.

Are pubic lice in the pubic hair the same as lice in the scalp?

- No, pubic lice found in the pubic hair differ from those in the scalp, although pubic lice can occasionally be found in other areas of the body including eyelashes, chest hair and armpit hair.

What is the treatment?

- There are several over-the-counter shampoos on the market for pubic lice.
- Used as directed, reapplication may or may not be necessary.
- Following treatment, egg casings (nits) may remain visible on the hair shaft. To remove these, a fine toothed comb dipped in vinegar can be used.
- Shaving of the pubic hair is not necessary.

How do I avoid catching pubic lice again?

To avoid catching pubic lice again, people should:

- Make sure that their sexual partners are treated.
- They should also wash articles that may be infected in hot water, such as bedding and clothing currently being worn.