

Introduction

Pubic Lice or “crabs” is a common sexually transmitted disease caused by *Phthirus pubis*. The main symptom is itching, which causes scratching, erythema, irritation and inflammation. The itching is due to an allergic reaction to the louse bite, and may take several days to occur.

Diagnosis

- The diagnosis of pubic lice is clinical
- Both eggs and adult lice are easily visible to the naked eye
- Lice may also be present on chest hair, axillary hair and eye lashes

Tests

- A full sexual health screen should be offered
- Specific tests for pubic lice are not usually necessary
- Eggs or lice may be viewed under microscopy to confirm diagnosis

Management

1. Permethrin 1% crème rinse or lotion (OTC) or 5% cream (on script)

- Apply to affected area and leave for 10min before washing off
- Permethrin is not ovicidal but remains on hair shaft for >10days so usually only one application is necessary
- A second application may be used if symptoms persist after 1 week

2. Malathion 1% cream

- Wet area and apply shampoo to affected area
- Leave at least 10 minutes, then wash off
- Use of Malathion in this way does not kill eggs so treatment needs be carried out again in 1 week to kill lice that have not yet hatched
- Safe for pregnant/lactating women and young children but Permethrin is the preferred option

Removal of eggs:

- A fine toothed comb dipped in vinegar can be used to remove egg casings which are firmly cemented to the hair shaft

Pubic Lice

Pediculosis pubis infection of the eyelashes:

- Anti-parasitic treatments should not be applied to the eyes
- Apply thick layer of **Vaseline to eyelashes twice a day for 8-10** days

General advice:

- Bedding and clothing currently being worn should be machine washed in hot water or removed from body contact for 72 hours
- Fumigation of the living area is not necessary

Partner notification and management of sexual partners

- Current sexual partners and bed partners should be treated empirically and offered a sexual health screen
- It is not necessary to treat household contacts