

## 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 eyelashes

## 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

### **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

### **Malathion 1% cream**

- Wet area and apply shampoo to affected area
- Leave at least 5minutes, then wash off
- Repeat the procedure immediately
- Use of Malathion in this way does not kill eggs so treatment needs be carried out 3 times at 3 day intervals 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

## 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