

Crabs

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Crabs (also called pubic lice) are small insects that infest pubic hair. Less commonly, they can infest other types of body hair such as eyelashes, eyebrows, mustache, beard or armpits. They are usually spread through sexual contact. They can also be spread through contact with clothing and bedding of someone with crabs. Animals do not get or spread pubic lice.

Symptoms

Symptoms include itching in the pubic area. To the naked eye, crabs look like small flakes of skin. Crab eggs look like white or gray dots attached to the hair.

Prevention

Do not have sex with someone who has crabs until they complete treatment.

Testing

Your health care provider can tell if you have crabs by looking at the infested area.

Treatment

Medicated creams and shampoos can cure crabs. Some of these treatments are available without a prescription. Clothing, bedding and towels should be machine-washed and dried on a hot cycle. Any other items that cannot be washed should be sealed in a plastic bag for two weeks.

Why Get Treatment

If left untreated, the area will continue to itch.

Repeated scratching of the infested area can result in other serious skin infections.

Sex Partners

Your sex and intimate partners also need to be examined and treated so they do not reinfest you or pass on the infestation to others.

New York City Sexual Health Clinics provide confidential, low- to no-cost services including STI and HIV testing.

To find a clinic, visit nyc.gov/health/clinics.

Crabs and Pregnancy

We do not know of any serious effects of having crabs during pregnancy. Some medicated shampoos and creams used to treat crabs could be dangerous to the fetus, so you should tell your health care provider if you are pregnant or breastfeeding when you seek treatment for crabs.

