



PEDICULOSIS (LICE)

Cause/Epidemiology

Head lice are caused by *Pediculosis humanus capitis*.

Body lice is caused by *Pediculosis humanus*

Crab lice are caused by *Phthirus pubis*.

Lice are communicable as long as lice or eggs remain alive on the infested person or clothing.

Head and body lice live for 7 – 10 days off a host. Lice that fall off the head rarely survive longer than 36 hours, move poorly off the head, are usually damaged, and therefore are unable to re-infest another person.

Crab lice live only 2 days off a host.

Clinical Presentation

Pediculosis is an infestation of lice of the hairy parts of the body or clothing with the eggs, larvae or adults. The crawling stages of this insect feed on human blood, which can result in severe itching.

Head lice are usually located on the scalp.

Crab lice are located in the pubic area and may also infect facial hair (including eyelashes in cases of heavy infestation), axillae and body surfaces.

Body lice are in seams of clothing. Body lice travel to the skin to feed and return back to the clothing.

Any person may become infested under suitable conditions or exposure. Pediculosis is easily transmitted from person-to-person during direct contact.

Head lice infestations are frequently found in school settings or institutions.

Crab lice infestations can be found among sexually active individuals.

Body lice infestation can be found in people living in crowded, unsanitary conditions where clothing is infrequently changed or laundered.



Repeated infestations may result in dermal hypersensitivity.

Usually, the first indication of an infestation is the itching or scratching in the area of the body where the lice feed. Scratching at the back of the head or around the ears should lead to an examination for head louse eggs (nits) on the hair. Itching around the genital area should lead to an examination for crab lice or their eggs. Scratching can be sufficiently intense to result in secondary bacterial infection in these areas.

Incubation

Pediculosis occurs worldwide. Outbreaks are common among children in school. The life cycle of the louse is composed of three stages, eggs, nymphs, and adults.

Under optimal conditions, the eggs of lice hatch in 7 – 10 days.

The nymphal stage of the life cycle lasts approximately 7 – 13 days, depending on temperature.

The egg-to-egg cycles averages three weeks.

It may take as long as two to three weeks or longer for a person to notice the intense itching associated with this infestation.

Transmission

Transmission of the head louse is by direct contact with an infested person's head/hair, or indirect contact with personal belongings such as headgear or pillowcases.

The body louse is transmitted by direct contact with an infested person or indirect contact with their personal belongings, especially shared clothing.

The crab louse is usually transmitted during sexual contact.

Infection Prevention and Control Practices

Follow Routine Practices for a resident with Pediculosis. Refer to Routine Practices section 4 for specific information. Glove for direct resident contact until effective treatment is completed. Usually 24 hours after initiation of treatment.



Occupational Health

Definition of Occupational Exposure

A healthcare worker who has had direct or indirect hair-to-hair contact with an infested person, or skin-to-skin contact with clothing or bedding of an infested person prior to 24 hours of effective treatment.

A Healthcare Worker Exposed to Pediculosis (of the head)

- Exposed healthcare workers shall contact Occupational Health/designate for clinical management
- No modification to work practices or work restrictions
- If there has been a significant exposure determined per the above definition, prophylactic treatments may be considered

A Healthcare Worker Symptomatic or Infected with Pediculosis (of the head)

- Confirm diagnosis (presence of nits or live lice)
- Inform Infection Prevention and Control immediately if the case is confirmed
- Healthcare workers shall be referred to Occupational Health/designate for clinical management
- Healthcare workers shall be excluded from work until the completion of effective treatment