



Lice

What are lice? Head lice are tiny, microscopic insects known as *Pediculus humanus*. They are sub typed based on the various location they infest: *Pediculus humanus* var. *capitis* (head lice), *Pediculus humanus* var. *corporis* (body lice), *Phthirus pubis* (pubic lice or crab lice).

How do lice present? Head lice are found predominantly in children, while body and pubic lice more often in adults. All types of lice however can occur at any age. Infestation with lice presents with intense itching in the affected areas. Examination of the area will reveal occasional lice insects, but more commonly the nits which are the eggs. These look like tiny white specks adherent to the base of the hair shaft. For body lice, the insects and/or nits often line the seams of clothing.

How do you treat lice? The treatment of choice is an over the counter Permethrin cream rinse (Nix) which should be applied to the hair and washed off after 10 minutes. This treatment can be repeated in 2-8 days. If this treatment fails, apply Nix and leave on for 4-8 hours before rinsing.

With all treatments the remaining nits must be removed. It is best to comb out the nits with a fine toothcomb after applying a dilute (50%) vinegar solution to the scalp. These combs are often available with the treatment cream rinse.

Examine and treat other infested contacts.

Occasionally, stubborn infestations require prescription strength Permethrin cream, which is left on overnight before rinsing.

If this fails, apply Petrolatum (50gms) to the scalp under a shower cap overnight followed by vigorous shampooing in the morning.

If all the above fails, shaving the head or affected area can also be done.

How to avoid getting lice? Avoid sharing combs, brushes, hair clips or elastics, hats, clothing, pillows and bedding with affected individuals. Pubic lice is often a sexually transmitted disease.