Body Lice (Pediculosis)
FAQ's & Answers

Body lice are insects that live on the body and in the clothing or bedding of infested humans. Infestation is common, found worldwide, and affects people of all races. Body lice infestations spread rapidly under crowded conditions where hygiene is poor and where there is frequent contact among people.

WHERE ARE BODY LICE FOUND?

Body lice are found on the body and on clothing or bedding used by infested people. Lice eggs are laid in the seams of clothing or on bedding. Occasionally eggs are attached to body hair. Lice found on the hair and head are not body lice; they are head lice. Lice are usually associated with poor personal hygiene, which may occur during war or natural disaster. Infestation is unlikely in anyone who bathes regularly.

CAN BODY LICE TRANSMIT DISEASE?

Yes. Epidemics of typhus and louse-borne relapsing fever have been caused by body lice. (Louse is the singular form of lice.) Though typhus is no longer widespread, epidemics still occur during times of war, civil unrest, natural disasters, in refugee camps, and in prisons where people live crowded together in unsanitary conditions. Typhus still exists in places where climate, chronic poverty, and social customs prevent regular changes and laundering of clothing.

WHAT ARE THE SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF BODY LICE?

Itching and rash are common. Both of these symptoms are your body's allergic reaction to the lice bite. Severe infestation can cause fever, body and headaches. Long-term body lice infestations may lead to thickening and discoloration of the skin, particularly around the waist, groin, and upper thighs. Sores on the body may be caused by scratching. These sores can sometimes become infected with bacteria or fungi.

HOW ARE BODY LICE SPREAD?

Body lice are spread directly through contact with a person who has body lice, or indirectly through shared clothing, beds, bed linens, or towels.

WHAT DO BODY LICE LOOK LIKE?

There are three forms of body lice:

- The egg (sometimes called a nit).
  - Nits are body lice eggs. They are generally easy to see in the seams of clothing, particularly around the waistline and under armpits. They are a bit smaller than the size of a pinhead. Nits may also be attached to body hair. They are oval and usually yellow to white. Nits may take 30 days to hatch.
- The nymph.
  - The egg hatches into a baby louse called a nymph. It looks like an adult body louse but is smaller. Nymphs mature into adults about 7 days after hatching. To live, the nymph must feed on blood.
- The adult.
  - The adult body louse is about the size of a sesame seed, has 6 legs and is tan to grayish-white. Females lay eggs. To live, adult lice need to feed on blood. If the louse falls off of a person, it dies within 10 days.

HOW IS A BODY LICE INFESTATION DIAGNOSED?

- Diagnosis is made by looking closely in the seams of clothing and on the body for eggs and for crawling lice. Diagnosis should be made by a health care provider if you are unsure about infestation.

HOW ARE BODY LICE TREATED?

Lice infestations are generally treated by giving the infested person a clean change of clothes, a shower, and by

laundering all worn clothing, bed linens, and towels. When laundering items, use the hot cycle (130°F / 55°C) of the washing machine. Set the dryer to the hot cycle to dry items. Items that cannot be laundered may be stored in a sealed plastic bag for 2 weeks or thrown away. Additionally, a 1% permethrin or pyrethrin lice shampoo, (also called pediculicide), may be applied to the body. Medication should be applied exactly as directed on the bottle or by your caregiver. Medicine is generally not needed if good hygiene is maintained and if laundering can be done at least once a week.

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