

What are body lice?

Body lice, or *Pediculosis corporis*, are lice that live on the body and in the clothing or bedding of infested humans.

Who is at risk for body lice?

Anyone can be infected with body lice; however, body lice in the United States are found primarily in homeless, transient populations who don't have access to changes of clothes or bathing. Infestation is unlikely to persist on anyone who bathes regularly and who regularly has access to freshly laundered clothing and bedding.

What are the symptoms of body lice?

Symptoms include intense itching, particularly at night, on the skin where lice are feeding. A rash caused by an allergic reaction to the bites is also common. Sores may develop due to continuous scratching of the area, which may result in secondary bacterial or fungal infection.

How soon do symptoms appear?

It takes one to two weeks for eggs to hatch. Lice can reproduce nine to 19 days after hatching.

How are body lice spread?

Body lice are spread through direct contact with a person who has body lice, or indirectly through shared clothing, beds, bed linens or towels. It can be spread only by crawling adult lice and not eggs.

When and for how long is a person able to spread body lice?

A person may spread body lice until all adult lice and eggs have been killed or removed.

How is a person diagnosed?

Identification of eggs and lice with the naked eye is possible; however, the use of a hand lens or microscope may help to confirm the identification. Adult lice are seldom seen because they move quickly and can conceal themselves effectively.

What is the treatment?

Treatment consists of improving hygiene and cleaning clothes and bedding. Additionally, a lice shampoo (pediculicide) may be applied to the body. This medication should be applied exactly as directed on the bottle or by your physician.

Does past infection make a person immune?

No. A person who previously had body lice may get it again.

Should children or others be excluded from child care, school, work or other activities if they have body lice?

No. Young children with body lice do not need to be excluded from child care or school. Children and adults should minimize any activity that involves direct contact with other people or sharing of any clothing and bedding until treatment has been completed or their physician considers them lice-free.

What can be done to prevent the spread of body lice?

Body lice are spread most commonly by direct contact with an infested person or an infested person's clothing or bedding. Body lice usually infest persons who do not launder and change their clothes regularly.

The following are steps that can be taken to help prevent and control the spread of body lice:

- Bathe regularly and change into properly laundered clothes at least once a week; launder infested clothing at least once a week.
- Machine wash and dry infested clothing and bedding using the hot water (at least 130°F) laundry cycle and the high heat drying cycle. Clothing and items that are not washable can be dry-cleaned OR sealed in a plastic bag and stored for 2 weeks.
- Do not share clothing, beds, bedding, and towels used by an infested person.
- Fumigation or dusting with chemical insecticides sometimes is necessary to control and prevent the spread of body lice for certain diseases (epidemic typhus).

Additional Information

Additional information is available by calling the North Dakota Department of Health at 800.472.2180.

Resources:

1. *Red Book: 2015 Report of the Committee on Infectious Diseases*. 30th ed. [Children in Out-Of-Home Care]. Kimberlin, DW; Brady, MT; Jackson, MA; Long, SS. American Academy of Pediatrics. 2015: 132-151.
2. *Red Book: 2015 Report of the Committee on Infectious Diseases*. 30th ed. [Pediculosis Corporis]. Kimberlin, DW; Brady, MT; Jackson, MA; Long, SS. American Academy of Pediatrics. 2015: 601-602.
3. Heymann, D. L. (2015). *Control of Communicable Diseases Manual, 20th Edition*. Pediculosis and Phthiriasis. American Public Health Association. 2015: 446-448.
4. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website. (2013). *Parasites - Lice - Body Lice*. www.cdc.gov/parasites/lice/body/gen_info/index.html.