

Body Lice

What are Body Lice?

Body lice are small insects that live on the body and in clothing or bedding of infested people. Body lice are found in areas where hygiene is poor and there is a lot of person-to-person contact. Infestation is unlikely in anyone who bathes regularly and who regularly has access to freshly washed clothing and bedding.

There are three stages of body lice:

- **nit (lice eggs):** They can be seen in clothing seams, especially around the waistline and armpits. Nits are oval and usually yellow to white in color. They take 1 to 2 weeks to hatch.
- **nymph (baby lice):** Nymphs mature into adults 9 to 12 days after hatching. They need to feed on blood to live.
- **adult:** Adult lice are the size of a sesame seed. They have 6 legs and are tan to greyish-white in color. They need to feed on blood. They die within 5 to 7 days of falling off a person at room temperature.

What are Symptoms of Body Lice?

Intense itching (especially at night) and rash (caused by an allergic reaction to the bites) are common. If the lice remain long enough, skin can become thick and discolored. Scratching may lead to sores.

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. Never share a bed, bedding, clothing or towels with a person who has lice.

How are Body Lice Found?

A health care provider can tell if you have body lice by looking at your body and clothing for eggs and crawling lice. Eggs, nymphs and lice can be seen with the naked eye.

How are Body Lice Treated?

Treatment is usually:

- a clean change of clothes
- a shower
- washing of clothing, bedding and towels in hot water. Use the hot cycle (130 F) of the washing machine. Set the dryer to the hot cycle to dry items.

Your health care provider may order a medicine to apply to your body. You likely will not need medicine if you follow the directions above.