

Patient Information:

Crabs and Scabies

COMMON IN COLLEGE SETTINGS

Crabs and scabies are two different types of parasites that infect humans. They live and reproduce at or under the surface of the skin and feed on blood. They may cause intense itching. Crabs and scabies infections are common where people live close together. College living arrangements provide many opportunities for the spread of crabs and scabies. Do not be embarrassed if you are diagnosed with either crabs or scabies since they are frequently seen in college health.

What Are Crabs?

Crabs, or pubic lice, are insects that infect pubic hair, hairy parts of the chest, armpits, upper eyelashes, and the head. Crabs are about 1mm in length, the size of a pin head, and are usually visible to the naked eye. Often they are found clinging to hair follicles. Nits, white colored crab eggs, may also be present.

The most common symptom of crabs is mild to moderate itching accompanied by mild inflammation at the infested site. Crabs will continue to live, feed and reproduce until they are treated.

How Do You Get Crabs?

Crabs are most frequently spread by sexual contact. Infrequently, they can be spread by sleeping in the same bed, exchanging clothes, sharing towels, and using the same brushes or combs of an infected person.

What is Scabies?

Scabies is a skin disease caused by very small, almost invisible, organisms called "itch mites." The mites burrow through the skin forming small raised red bumps.

Itching at the site of infection is the most common symptom and is most intense at night. A rash usually accompanies it. Regular sites of mite infections are between the fingers, wrist folds, armpits, breasts, groin, penis, buttocks, or along the belt-line. Like crab infections, scabies mites will continue to live, feed and reproduce until they are treated.

How Do You Get Scabies?

Scabies is transmitted by close physical contact with an infected person. Infrequently, the mites are transmitted through infected bedding, towels, and clothing.

DIAGNOSING CRABS AND SCABIES

SHC health care providers visually diagnose crabs and scabies. Sometimes this requires taking a tiny scraping of skin from an infected area and examining it under a microscope. This procedure is relatively painless.

TREATMENTS FOR CRABS AND SCABIES

Crabs and scabies are cured with prescription and over-the-counter pediculocides (chemicals that kill parasites) creams, lotions, or shampoos. If you have crabs or scabies, you should notify anyone who recently came in close contact with you (particularly intimate sexual contact). If they have any evidence of infection, they should consult their health care provider for advice.

Important!

Since both crabs and scabies are often spread by sexual contact, it is wise to be screened for other sexually transmitted diseases.

TIPS FOR TREATMENT:

The following precautions will help ensure the successful treatment of crabs and scabies and reduce the chances of reinfestations.

- Do not scratch the infected areas.
- Use a pediculocide cream, lotion, or shampoo as directed by your SHC health care provider.
- Persons with whom you have had close physical contact, particularly sexual partners, should be checked and treated if necessary.

Crabs and Scabies

- Wash (or dry clean) clothes, furniture covers, and bedding in hot water and dry 20 minutes in the dryer.
- Change clothes, underwear, and pajamas daily.
- Thoroughly vacuum: floors, carpets, mattresses, pillows, furniture, etc.
- Soak personal articles such as combs and brushes in hot water (at least 130° F) or in isopropyl alcohol for at least 20 minutes.
- Thoroughly clean all bath tubs, showers, toilet seats and vinyl upholstery with 70% isopropyl alcohol.
- All close contacts should be carefully examined for evidence of infestation for at least two weeks.
- If symptoms continue, return to SHC for a recheck.