

FACT SHEET

Knowing the Difference: Head, Body, and Pubic Lice (Pediculosis)

Head Lice

Pediculus humanus capitis

Description

- Adult lice 2.1-3.3 mm in length
- Infest the head and neck regions
- Not known to transmit disease

Transmission

- Spread through direct contact or rarely through sharing combs, brushes or towels, or through items that have been in contact with an infested person.

Treatment and Prevention

- IDPH recommends a 14-day treatment process.
- For a brochure detailing head lice treatment visit: www.idph.state.ia.us/hcci/comm/pdf/headlice_brochure.pdf

Body Lice

Pediculus humanus corporis

Description

- Adult lice 2.3-3.6 mm in length
- Live on clothing and move to skin to feed
- Can spread disease

Transmission

- Spread by direct contact or through items that have been in contact with an infested person
- Generally associated with overcrowding and poor hygiene

Treatment and Prevention

- Primarily improved hygiene
- Medication is usually not necessary

Pubic Lice (Crabs)

Phthirus pubis

Description

- Adult lice 1.1-1.8 mm in length
- Primarily found in pubic area but less frequently can be found in coarse hair elsewhere on the body (for example, eyebrows, eyelashes, beard, mustache, chest, armpits, etc.).
- Not known to transmit disease

Transmission

- Usually spread through sexual contact

Treatment and Prevention

- Over the counter or prescription medications are available

Characteristics common to all 3 types of lice:

- Dogs, cats, and other pets do not play a role in the transmission of any type of human lice.
- Lice move by crawling; they cannot hop or fly.
- Human lice survive by feeding on human blood.

Differences between the 3 types of lice:

- **Size:**
 - Pubic lice are the smallest and vary from 1.1-1.8 mm in length.
 - Head lice are generally 2.1-3.3 mm in length
 - Body lice are typically the largest and vary from 2.3-3.6 mm in length
- **Location:**
 - Head lice are mainly found on the head and neck region.
 - Body lice are found on clothing and attach to the body only when feeding.
 - Pubic lice are found in the pubic hair or other coarse hair on the body.
- **Transmission:**
 - Head lice are transmitted through head to head contact or rarely through sharing hats, combs, towels, etc.
 - Body lice are transmitted through close contact and usually under un-sanitary or crowded conditions.
 - Pubic lice are transmitted mainly through sexual contact.
- **Treatment:**
 - Varies from over-the-counter and prescription medication in head and public lice to practicing good hygiene and maintaining a clean environment in body lice.

For more information visit:

Head Lice: www.cdc.gov/lice/head/index.html

Body Lice: www.cdc.gov/lice/body/index.html
Pubic Lice: www.cdc.gov/lice/pubic/index.html