

**E**xposure to lice can cause skin irritation, scratching, and discomfort. Transfer between people can occur via close physical contact with infested persons or with infested bedding, clothing, and towels. Topical medications and good hygiene are very effective remedies to remove these parasites.

## WHAT ARE LICE?

Lice are small, wingless, parasitic insects that feed on human blood. They can spread quickly in areas where people are in close physical contact, and by sharing items such as clothing with a person who is infested with lice. Dogs, cats, and other pets do not play a role in the transmission of human lice.



Head Louse  
Source: Wikipedia

There are three types of lice:

- **Head lice** (*Pediculus humanus capitis*). These lice are found on the scalp. Head lice infestation (or pediculosis) is spread most commonly by close person-to-person contact.
- **Body lice** (*Pediculus humanus corporis*). These lice live in clothing and on bedding. They locate to the skin to feed. Body lice infestations (pediculosis) are spread most commonly by close person-to-person contact and usually occur in persons who live under conditions of crowding and poor hygiene.
- **Pubic lice** (*Phthirus pubis*): Pubic lice occur on the skin and hair of the pubic area and, less frequently, on coarse body hair (armpits, beard, chest, eyebrows, eyelashes, mustache, etc.). Pubic lice infestations (pthiriasis) are usually spread through sexual contact.



Body Louse  
Source: Wikipedia



Pubic Louse  
Source: CDC

## WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF LOUSE INFESTATION?

Symptoms include intense itching and sores caused by scratching. Rash is another common symptom (body lice).

## WHAT YOU CAN DO

- **Avoid direct contact with infested persons.** Physical contact or sexual contact (pubic lice) are transmission points for these agents.
- **Avoid contact with items (e.g., bedding, clothes) used by an infested person.** Ensure that all bedding, clothing, and towels are thoroughly decontaminated.
- **Apply topical medications as necessary.** Use of topical medications will destroy lice, and the eggs they lay.

Only the body louse is known to spread diseases, such as epidemic Typhus, trench fever, and louse-borne relapsing fever. Also, sores caused by scratching can become infected with bacteria found on a person's skin.

## IS THERE A TREATMENT FOR LICE?

Yes. Both over-the-counter and prescription medications are available for treatment of head and pubic lice infestations.

Improved hygiene and access to regular changes of clean clothes is the only treatment needed for body lice infestations.

Diseases caused by the body louse require additional treatment.

## REFERENCES

[CDC: Parasites - Lice](#)

