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# Body Lice

## What are body lice?

Body lice (also called clothes lice) are tiny insects which live and lay nits (lice eggs) on clothing. They are parasites, and they need to feed on human blood to survive. They usually only move to the skin to feed.

Body lice are one of the three types of lice that live on humans. The other two types are **head lice**

[\[https://medlineplus.gov/headlice.html\]](https://medlineplus.gov/headlice.html) and **pubic lice** [\[https://medlineplus.gov/pubiclice.html\]](https://medlineplus.gov/pubiclice.html) . Each type of lice is different, and getting one type does not mean that you will get another type.

Body lice can spread diseases, such as typhus, trench fever, and relapsing fever.

## How do body lice spread?

Body lice move by crawling, because they cannot hop or fly. One way that they spread is through physical contact with a person who has body lice. They can also spread through contact with clothing, beds, bed linens, or towels that were used by a person with body lice. You cannot get lice from animals.

## Who is at risk for body lice?

Body lice is most common in people who cannot bathe and wash their clothes regularly, especially if they live in crowded conditions. In the United States, this is most often **people experiencing homelessness**

[\[https://medlineplus.gov/homelessnessandhealth.html\]](https://medlineplus.gov/homelessnessandhealth.html) . In other countries, body lice can also affect refugees and victims of war or natural disasters.

## What are the symptoms of body lice?

The most common symptom of body lice is intense itching [\[https://medlineplus.gov/itching.html\]](https://medlineplus.gov/itching.html) . There may also be a rash, which is caused by an allergic reaction to the bites. The itching causes some people to scratch until they get sores. Sometimes these sores can become infected with **bacteria** [\[https://medlineplus.gov/bacterialinfections.html\]](https://medlineplus.gov/bacterialinfections.html) or **fungi** [\[https://medlineplus.gov/fungalinfections.html\]](https://medlineplus.gov/fungalinfections.html) .

If someone has body lice for a long time, the heavily bitten areas of their skin can become thickened and discolored. This is most common around your midsection (waist, groin, and upper thighs).

## How do you know if you have body lice?

A diagnosis of body lice usually comes from finding nits and crawling lice in the seams of clothing. Sometimes a body louse can be seen crawling or feeding on the skin. Other times it takes a magnifying lens to see the lice or nits.


## What are the treatments for body lice?

The main treatment for body lice is to improve personal hygiene. That means regular showers and washing clothes, bedding, and towels at least once a week. Use hot water to wash the laundry, and dry it using the hot cycle of the dryer. Some people may also need a lice-killing medicine.

## Learn More

- About Body Lice [<https://www.cdc.gov/lice/about/body-lice.html>] (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)  
Also in Spanish [<https://www.cdc.gov/lice/es/about/acerca-de-los-piojos-del-cuerpo.html>]
- Body Lice [<https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/body-lice/symptoms-causes/syc-20350310?p=1>]  
(Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research)  
Also in Spanish [<https://www.mayoclinic.org/es/diseases-conditions/body-lice/symptoms-causes/syc-20350310?p=1>]

## Clinical Trials

- ClinicalTrials.gov: Lice Infestations [<https://clinicaltrials.gov/search?cond=%22Lice+Infestations%22&aggFilters=status:not%20rec>]  (National Institutes of Health)

## Patient Handouts

- Body lice [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/000838.htm>] (Medical Encyclopedia)  
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/ency/article/000838.htm>]



## National Institutes of Health

The primary NIH organization for research on *Body Lice* is the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases [<http://www.niaid.nih.gov/>]

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