

Pubic lice - Management

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How should I manage someone presenting with pubic lice infestation?

- Consider if the pubic lice infestation has been acquired via sexual or non-sexual contact.
- For adults and adolescents presenting with suspected or confirmed pubic lice infestation acquired via sexual contact:
 - Refer to a genito-urinary medicine (GUM) clinic for treatment, screening for other sexually transmitted infections (STIs), and contact tracing.
 - If an appointment at a GUM clinic is not possible:
 - Screen for *Chlamydia* and other STIs as appropriate.
 - Treat with an [insecticide](#).
 - Consider follow-up in a GUM clinic in about a week to perform a full STI screen.
 - Advise to avoid close body contact until they and their current partner have been treated.
 - Recommend that the person informs their partners of the previous 3 months that they should be examined for pubic lice, and treated if necessary.
- For children and individuals who have acquired pubic lice infestation via non-sexual contact:
 - Treat with an [insecticide](#). Repeat after 7 days.
 - Advise to avoid close body contact with others until the infestation has been treated.
 - Encourage the person to inform close contacts of the past 3 months that they should also be examined for pubic lice.

- Although children usually acquire the infestation via non-sexual contact, consider the possibility of sexual abuse.
- Consider symptomatic treatment for itching.

[In depth](#)

How should I manage pubic lice infestation involving the eye lashes?

- Treat pubic lice infestation of the eye lashes with either [inert occlusive ophthalmic ointment](#) (e.g. Simple eye ointment BP) or a [topical insecticide](#) (a cream rinse or shampoo should be used).
 - An inert occlusive ophthalmic ointment is preferred for people under the age of 18 years, and for those who are pregnant or breastfeeding.
- Removal of nits (empty shells) from the eyelashes is unnecessary.
- Treat the eyelashes and the rest of the [body](#) at the same time to ensure complete eradication of pubic lice.

[In depth](#)

Which insecticide preparation should I prescribe for pubic lice infestation?

- Prescribe:
 - Malathion 0.5% aqueous lotion, or
 - Permethrin 5% dermal cream
- The choice primarily depends on a response to previous treatment, patient's age and if the person is a pregnant, or breastfeeding woman.
 - If appropriate treatment with one insecticide has not been successful, switch to a different class of insecticide (i.e. switch between malathion and permethrin rather than trying a different preparation containing the same class of insecticide).
 - Malathion is suitable for everyone — unless treatment with it has been unsuccessful.

- Permethrin is suitable for individuals over the age of 18 years — unless they are pregnant, or breastfeeding, or treatment with it has been unsuccessful. It may be considered for people who are under the age of 18 years, or pregnant, or breastfeeding if malathion is ineffective or unsuitable.
- Carbaryl should not be considered — unless resistance to both malathion and pyrethroid insecticides (permethrin or phenothrin) is suspected.
- Aqueous preparations and dermal cream are preferred over alcoholic preparations.
- Insecticides should not be used more than once a week, and should not be used for more than three consecutive weeks.

[In depth](#)

How should insecticide preparations be applied when treating pubic lice?

- Apply the insecticide twice with applications one week apart.
- Apply to the whole body, paying particular attention to hairy areas, but that they should avoid getting in the eyes.

[In depth](#)

How should I follow up someone treated for pubic lice?

- Follow up after about 7 days to assess if treatment has been successful.
- Inspect all hairy areas for pubic lice.

[In depth](#)

Prescriptions

1st-line insecticide (age 18 years and over)

Age from 18 years onwards

Malathion 0.5% aqueous liquid: 2 applications

Malathion 0.5% aqueous liquid
 Apply to the whole body, including the scalp, face, neck, and ears. Leave on for 12 hours or overnight. Wash off. Repeat after 7 days.
 Supply 200 ml.

Age: from 18 years onwards

NHS cost: £5.70

OTC cost: £9.99

Licensed use: no - off-label dose

Patient information: Apply to the entire skin surface including the scalp, neck, ears and face. Paying particular attention to the pubic hair, hair around the anus, between the legs, and other hairy areas of the body. Apply to eyebrows, beards and moustaches. Avoid contact with the eyes. Leave on for 12 hours. Then wash off. Repeat after 7 days.

Permethrin 5% cream: 2 applications

Permethrin 5% cream

Apply to the whole body, including the scalp, face, neck, and ears. Leave on for 24 hours. Wash off. Repeat after 7 days.

Supply 60 g.

Age: from 18 years onwards

NHS cost: £11.04

OTC cost: £19.90

Licensed use: no - off-label dose

Patient information: Apply to the entire skin surface including the scalp, neck, ears and face. Paying particular attention to the pubic hair, hair around the anus, between the legs, and other hairy areas of the body. Apply to eyebrows, beards and moustaches. Avoid contact with the eyes. Leave on for 24 hours. Then wash off. Repeat after 7 days.

1st-line insecticide (age < 18 years/pregnant/breastfeeding)

Age from 6 months onwards

Malathion 0.5% aqueous liquid: 2 applications

Malathion 0.5% aqueous liquid

Apply to the whole body, including the scalp, face, neck, and ears. Leave on for 12 hours or overnight. Wash off. Repeat after 7 days.

Supply 200 ml.

Age: from 6 months onwards

NHS cost: £5.70

OTC cost: £9.99

Licensed use: no - off-label dose

Patient information: Apply to the entire skin surface including the scalp, neck, ears and face. Paying particular attention to the pubic hair, hair around the anus, between the legs, and other hairy areas of the body. Apply to eyebrows, beards and moustaches. Avoid contact with the eyes. Leave on for 12 hours. Then wash off. Repeat after 7 days.

Eyelash infestation: insecticide

Age from 18 years onwards

Permethrin 1% scalp application: apply to eyelashes

Permethrin 1% scalp application

Apply to the eye margins and leave on for 10 minutes before washing out. Repeat treatment after 7 days.

Supply 59 ml.

Age: from 18 years onwards

NHS cost: £2.38

OTC cost: £3.99

Licensed use: no - off-label indication

Patient information: Gently apply the preparation to the eyelashes using a cotton bud or cotton swab. Keep the eyes close for 10 minutes before rinsing it out with water. Repeat treatment after 7 days. Minimise contact to eyes. If preparation gets into the eyes, rinse the eyes with plenty of water. If lice are still present after end of treatment, consult your doctor.

Eyelash infestation: occlusive ophthalmic ointments

Age from 6 months onwards

Simple eye ointment: Apply to eyelashes twice daily

Simple eye ointment

Apply twice daily to the eyelashes on both eyes.

Supply 4 g.

Age: from 6 months onwards

NHS cost: £2.68

OTC cost: £4.73

Licensed use: no - off-label indication

Patient information: Ensure all the eyelashes are well covered by the ointment. Before applying a new coating of ointment, gently wipe the eyelashes and eyelids clean with facial tissue paper. Continue with the treatment for at least 8 days, and until 10 days if live lice (not nits or eggs) continue to be seen. If lice are still present after 10 days of treatment, consult your doctor.

Lacri-lube eye ointment: apply twice daily to eyelashes

Lacri-lube eye ointment

Apply twice daily to the eyelashes on both eyes.

Supply 5 g.

Age: from 6 months onwards

NHS cost: £2.96

OTC cost: £5.22

Licensed use: no - off-label indication

Patient information: Before applying a new coating of ointment, gently wipe the eyelashes and eyelids clean with facial tissue paper. Continue with the treatment for at least 8 days, and until 10 days if live lice (not nits or eggs) continue to be seen. If lice are still present after 10 days of treatment, consult your doctor.

Lubri-Tears eye ointment: apply twice daily to eyelashes

Lubri-Tears eye ointment

Apply twice daily to the eyelashes on both eyes.

Supply 5 g.

Age: from 6 months onwards

NHS cost: £2.29

OTC cost: £4.03

Licensed use: no - off-label indication

Patient information: Before applying a new coating of ointment, gently wipe the eyelashes and eyelids clean with facial tissue paper. Continue with the treatment for at least 8 days, and until 10 days if live lice (not nits or eggs) continue to be seen. If lice are still present after 10 days of treatment, consult your doctor.

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How should I manage someone with pubic lice unresponsive to treatment?

- For pubic lice infestation unresponsive to initial insecticide treatment and acquired via sexual contact:
 - If the person has not yet been referred, refer them to a genito-urinary medicine (GUM) clinic for confirmation of infestation, treatment, screening for other sexually transmitted infections, and contact tracing.
 - If treatment has been initiated at a GUM, refer the individual back to the GUM clinic for further investigation and treatment.
 - If referral is not possible, manage as for those with non-sexually acquired infestation (see below).
- For pubic lice infestation unresponsive to initial insecticide treatment and acquired via non-sexual contact:
 - Consider whether treatment failure is due to inadequate application technique, insecticide resistance, or reinfestation:
 - Treatment failure due to inadequate application technique can be identified by checking how the treatment was applied by the individual (and/or carer).
 - Resistance to insecticide is likely when treatment has no effect on the infestation and the health professional is certain that the treatment has been correctly applied.
 - Reinfestation should be suspected if pubic lice reappeared after successful eradication. Check if other contacts were examined or treated for pubic lice.
 - If inadequate application technique seems probable:
 - Review the treatment strategy with the individual (e.g. application method, amount of insecticide used, contact time).

- Consider repeating the previous treatment with the correct technique (rather than switching to a different treatment).
- If the individual has problems applying the product, consider changing the formulation (e.g. from topical lotion to dermal cream or vice versa).
- If insecticide resistance is suspected:
 - Switch to a different class of insecticide (i.e. switch between malathion and permethrin).
 - Consider carbaryl if resistance to both malathion and permethrin is encountered or suspected.
- If reinfestation seems probable:
 - Consider repeating the previous treatment (rather than switching to a different treatment).
 - Recommend to the individual that all close contacts be assessed for pubic lice and that all positive cases be treated simultaneously.

[In depth](#)

Prescriptions

2nd-line insecticide (age 18 years & over)

Age from 18 years onwards

Malathion 0.5% aqueous liquid: 2 applications

Malathion 0.5% aqueous liquid

Apply to the whole body, including the scalp, face, neck, and ears. Leave on for 12 hours or overnight. Wash off. Repeat after 7 days.

Supply 200 ml.

Age: from 18 years onwards

NHS cost: £5.70

OTC cost: £9.99

Licensed use: no - off-label dose

Patient information: Apply to the entire skin surface including the scalp, neck, ears and face. Paying particular attention to the pubic hair, hair around the anus, between the legs, and other hairy areas of the body. Apply to eyebrows, beards and moustaches. Avoid contact with the eyes. Leave on for 12 hours. Then wash off. Repeat after 7 days.

Permethrin 5% cream: 2 applications

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Apply to the whole body, including the scalp, face, neck, and ears. Leave on for 24 hours. Wash off. Repeat after 7 days.
Supply 60 g.

Age: from 18 years onwards

NHS cost: £11.04

OTC cost: £19.90

Licensed use: no - off-label dose

Patient information: Apply to the entire skin surface including the scalp, neck, ears and face. Paying particular attention to the pubic hair, hair around the anus, between the legs, and other hairy areas of the body. Apply to eyebrows, beards and moustaches. Avoid contact with the eyes. Leave on for 24 hours. Then wash off. Repeat after 7 days.

Carbaryl 1% aqueous liquid: 2 applications

Carbaryl 1% aqueous liquid

Apply to the whole body, including the scalp, face, neck, and ears. Leave on for 12 hours or overnight. Wash off. Repeat after 7 days.
Supply 200 ml.

Age: from 18 years onwards

NHS cost: £9.12

Licensed use: no - off-label indication

Patient information: Apply to the entire skin surface including the scalp, neck, ears and face. Paying particular attention to the pubic hair, hair around the anus, between the legs, and other hairy areas of the body. Apply to eyebrows, beards and moustaches. Avoid contact with the eyes. Leave on for 12 hours. Then wash off. Repeat after 7 days.

2nd-line insecticide (age < 18 years/pregnant/breastfeeding)

Age from 6 months onwards

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Permethrin 5% cream

Apply to the whole body, including the scalp, face, neck, and ears. Leave on for 24 hours. Wash off. Repeat after 7 days.
Supply 60 g.

Age: from 6 months onwards

NHS cost: £11.04

OTC cost: £19.90

Licensed use: no - off-label dose

Patient information: Apply to the entire skin surface including the scalp, neck, ears and face. Paying particular attention to the pubic hair, hair around the anus, between the legs, and other hairy areas of the body. Apply to eyebrows, beards and moustaches. Avoid contact with the eyes. Leave on for 24 hours. Then wash off. Repeat after 7 days.

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Patient information: Gently apply the preparation to the eyelashes using a cotton bud or cotton swab. Keep the eyes close for 10 minutes before rinsing it out with water. Repeat treatment after 7 days. Minimise contact to eyes. If preparation gets into the eyes, rinse the eyes with plenty of water. If lice are still present after end of treatment, consult your doctor.

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Simple eye ointment

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Supply 4 g.

Age: from 6 months onwards

NHS cost: £2.68

OTC cost: £4.73

Licensed use: no - off-label indication

Patient information: Ensure all the eyelashes are well covered by the ointment. Before applying a new coating of ointment, gently wipe the eyelashes and eyelids clean with facial tissue paper. Continue with the treatment for at least 8 days, and until 10 days if live lice (not nits or eggs) continue to be seen. If lice are still present after 10 days of treatment, consult your doctor.

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