

# Protect yourself from body lice and prevent illness

Body lice live and lay eggs on clothing or bedding and only move to people to feed. Body lice can spread disease. The best way to avoid body lice is by showering as often as possible and wearing clean clothes.

If you have a history of having body lice and are now experiencing an illness with fever, chills, or body aches, then contact a health care provider.

## What are body lice?

- Body lice are small insects that live on the body and in clothing, bedding or towels.
- Often times, body lice are found on the inside of clothing, especially around seams next to the skin.
- Body lice feed on human blood, but only go onto the skin to feed, so they are not found on the skin very often.
- Lice need body heat to grow to adults and for eggs to hatch.
- Lice eggs (called nits) are very small and remain alive on clothing up to 30 days when not being worn by a person.

## How does body lice spread?

- By physical contact with a person who has body lice.
- By contact with items such as clothing, beds, bed linens, or towels that have been in contact with someone with lice.
- By being in crowded areas or close to other people with lice – where a person cannot shower or clean clothes often, or when sharing other people's clothing, bedding or towels.

Contact a local mobile laundry and bathing services: <https://bit.ly/LaundryTruckService>

For other resources and support, contact CCH at 303-293-2220

Questions about body lice? Contact the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment at 303-692-2700 or Tri-County Health Department at 303-220-9200.

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

- Body lice are identified by looking for lice eggs or crawling lice in the seams of clothing close to the skin and on the body.
- Body lice could be present on people who have a lot of itching or an unexplained red skin rash, especially if the person is living with a lot of people crowded together, is unable to shower or clean clothes, or is homeless.
- Body lice and eggs can be large enough to see with the naked eye, but you might need a magnifying lens to find lice or eggs.
- It is best to ask a health care provider if you are not sure about having body lice.

Photo Credit: <https://bit.ly/BodyLiceImage> and <https://www.coccd.org/page/BodyLice>



Body lice skin rash

Body lice on clothing



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## Can body lice cause disease?

- Lice can spread a bacteria called *Bartonella quintana* that causes fever, bone pain, particularly of the shins, headache and dizziness, and can lead to a serious blood or heart infection. *Bartonella* infection is treated with antibiotics.
- People who have chronic conditions - such as HIV/AIDS, diabetes, or alcoholism - are at higher risk of infection and are more likely to experience serious issues.

## How can I get rid of body lice?

- Shower as often as possible, at least weekly. Medication is also available if recommended by a health care provider.
- Wash clothing, bedding, and towels at least weekly using hot water (130°F) and machine dried using the hot cycle.
- If items cannot be washed at high temperature or have a lot of lice on them, seal the items in a plastic bag and store for two-weeks or throw them away.
- To prevent body lice, bathe and wash clothes at least weekly and avoid sharing clothing (including headwear), towels, or bedding.

## How are body lice different from bed bugs and other lice?

### Adult Body Lice



Photo Credit: [CDC PHIL](#)

- Body lice spend most of their time on clothes people are wearing.
- Body lice are tan to grayish-white in color, have long, thin bodies and are about the size of a sesame seed.
- Body lice are different from head lice, but look similar in shape and structure; head lice are only found on the head, not in the clothing, and are smaller than body lice.
- Body lice are different from pubic lice; pubic lice are round and crab-shaped.

### Bed Bugs



Photo Credit: [CDC PHIL](#)

- Bed bugs are usually found in the environment close to where people sleep.
- Bed bugs are flat (when unfed).
- Bed bug adults are red-brown in color and are slightly smaller than an apple seed.

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