



## Public Health Advisory

December 19, 2023

# Increase in Reported Infestations with Head Lice (Pediculosis), Body Lice, and Scabies in the Clark County Community

### SUMMARY POINTS

- An increased number of persons affected by infestations with head lice, body lice, and scabies has been reported affecting the population experiencing homelessness in Las Vegas.
- Providers should consider head lice, body lice, and scabies infestations in individuals reporting itching and excoriated rashes as diagnosis is made by physical exam.
- Treatment with a pediculicide should be provided for those with an active head or body lice infection.
- Treatment with a scabicide lotion should be provided for all those with active scabies infestation or for the person's close contacts.
- Additional information can be found on the SNHD website at <https://www.southernnevadahealthdistrict.org/Health-Topics/lice-head-lice-pediculosis/> and <https://www.southernnevadahealthdistrict.org/Health-Topics/scabies/>.

#### **Situation:**

The Southern Nevada Health District (SNHD) Division of Disease Surveillance and Control (DDSC) is investigating a report of an increased number of community members, particularly those experiencing homelessness, affected by head lice, body lice, and scabies.

- **Head lice** is caused by a parasitic insect found on the head, eyebrows, and eyelashes of people spread by direct contact with the hair of an infested person.
- **Body lice** is caused by parasitic insects that live on clothing and bedding used by infested persons and spread by direct physical contact with infested articles.
- **Scabies** is an infestation of the skin by the human itch mite which burrows into the upper layer of the skin. It is spread by direct, prolonged, skin-to-skin contact with a person who has scabies.

#### **Actions for Clinicians:**

Awareness of symptoms and exam findings associated with infestations caused by these parasites is paramount for diagnosis and treatment initiation. The most common symptom for all infestations is itching which is worse at night. Clinicians should also be aware of the increased risk of secondary bacterial infections in those with an infestation with severe excoriations or sores.

- **Head lice** – itching; tickling feeling or sensation of something moving in the hair; sores on the head caused by scratching.
- **Body lice** – intense itching and rash; sores and secondary bacterial infections of the skin caused by itching.
- **Scabies** – itching and skin rash. Rash is typically papular and tiny burrows may also be seen on the skin which appear as tiny raised and serpiginous grayish-white or skin colored lines. Rash is typically limited to common sites including between the fingers, wrist, armpit, waist, buttocks, and elbows. The head, face, neck, palms, and soles are typically spared in adult infections.

#### **Diagnosis and Treatment:**

The diagnosis of infestation with head lice, body lice, or scabies is made by physical examination.

- **Head lice** – live adult crawling lice will be seen in the hair and use of a fine-toothed comb may facilitate identification. Nits (eggs) can be seen at the base of the hair shaft nearest the scalp and appear yellow or white in color. Treatment with a pediculicide is indicated for those with an active infestation. Retreatment 7-9 days later is recommended to kill any surviving hatched lice before new eggs are produced.
- **Body lice** – identification of eggs and crawling lice in the seams of the clothing. Clothing, bedding, and towels used by an infested person should be laundered using hot water (at least 130°F) and dried using the hot cycle. Topical pediculicides can also be used in individuals where clothing might not be laundered at least once per week.
- **Scabies** – identification of the customary appearance of rash and presence of burrows. Treatment is with a scabicide, which requires prescription. Scabicide lotion or cream should be applied to all areas of the body from the neck down to the feet and toes and left on for the recommended time before washing off. If itching is still present more than 2-4 weeks after treatment, retreatment may be necessary.

### **Environmental Control:**

Spread of both lice and scabies can be mitigated by treatment of infested individuals and appropriate laundering of clothing and bedding. Mopping of floors and vacuuming of carpets and furniture in shared space areas should be performed.

- **Head and body lice** – do not share clothing, combs, brushes, or towels without proper disinfection. Clothing and linens should be machine washed and dried using hot water (at least 130°F) and high heat drying cycle. Non-washable clothing should be stored in a plastic bag for 2 weeks. Combs and brushes can be disinfected by soaking them in hot water (130°F) for 5-10 minutes.
- **Scabies** – Bedding and clothing worn or used next to the skin should be machine washed and dried using hot water and dryer cycles. Clothing or items that cannot be washed can be stored in a closed plastic bag for 5-7 days.

### **Reporting/Contact Us:**

Medical providers can contact the SNHD 24/7 surveillance line in the Acute Communicable Disease Control Program at 702-759-1300 or via fax at 702-759-1414 to ask questions or report outbreaks.

### **For More Information**

- [Head Lice Information](https://www.southernnevadahealthdistrict.org/Health-Topics/lice-head-lice-pediculosis/) (<https://www.southernnevadahealthdistrict.org/Health-Topics/lice-head-lice-pediculosis/>)
- [Scabies Information](https://www.southernnevadahealthdistrict.org/Health-Topics/scabies/) (<https://www.southernnevadahealthdistrict.org/Health-Topics/scabies/>)



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**Health Alert:** conveys the highest level of importance; warrants immediate action or attention

**Health Advisory:** provides important information for a specific incident or situation; may not require immediate action

**Health Update:** provides updated information regarding an incident or situation; unlikely to require immediate action