

# Medical Entomology Centre

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## DID YOU GET 'CRABBY' THIS CHRISTMAS?

Thousands of people celebrated this Christmas with colleagues at office parties. You may think the only risk was drinking too much mulled wine or letting a year's worth of flirting with the boss's daughter reap its reward under the mistletoe, but another danger could have been lurking. Along with closeness brought on by festive cheer, there may have been an army of infectious insects ready to share in the fun.

The infamous Crab Louse (*Pthirus pubis*) is spread through intimate, though not necessarily sexual, contact. They need you to get as close to someone else as possible and obviously this united time of the year is perfect! Crab Lice, despite popular belief, do not just live in pubic hair; all body hair can be affected, even eyebrows, beards and moustaches.

These lice are relatively inactive, meaning discovery of the 2mm pests can often come too late when sexual partners, family members or friends have already been invaded.

The female louse needs to mate only once to remain fertile throughout her lifetime and can lay eggs every day. Once hatched, the young lice begin feeding straight away and as they are blood feeders, will gorge themselves on you until they are discovered.

If you suspect you have Crab Lice, immediate treatment should be sought. They will not go away spontaneously. Pharmacies sell effective over-the-counter treatments that can quickly help you eradicate the problem but you will need to tell anyone who you may have passed them to or else you may get them back!

**NOTES FOR EDITORS: For further information, interviews or filming please contact Ian Burgess, Director of Medical Entomology Centre or Elizabeth Kidman, Senior Entomologist on 01763263011.**