

What are Head Lice?

- Head lice (*Pediculus capitis*) are small insects that can live on the scalp and neck hair of a human host.
- Approximately 6 to 12 million children are infected with head lice each year.
- Head lice are **NOT** a health hazard, and are **NOT** responsible for the spread of **ANY** diseases.

Facts about Head Lice

- Anyone can get head lice, but preschool and elementary-age children, 3-11, and their families are infested most often. Personal hygiene, cleanliness in the home or school, and frequency of brushing or shampooing has nothing to do with getting head lice.
- Head lice are parasitic insects and need blood to feed on each day.
- Head lice cannot survive for more than a day or so at room temperature without access to a person's blood.
- Head lice CANNOT jump or fly, they crawl.
- Head lice are transmitted by direct contact with a person's hair or indirectly through objects, such as combs, brushes, or hats.
- Pets CANNOT transmit head lice.

What Do Head Lice Look Like?

There are three forms of lice: the egg (also called a nit), the nymph, and the adult.

- **Nits** are lice eggs. They are very small, about the size of a knot in thread, hard to see, and are often confused for dandruff or hair spray droplets. Nits are laid by the adult female at the base of the hair shaft nearest the scalp. They are firmly attached to the hair shaft. They are oval and usually yellow to white. Nits take about 8-9 days to hatch. Eggs that are likely to hatch are usually located within 1/4 inch of the scalp.
- The nit hatches into a baby louse called a **nymph**. It looks like an adult head louse, but smaller. Nymphs mature into adults about 9-12 days after hatching. To live, the nymph must feed on human blood from the scalp.
- The **adult** louse is about the size of a sesame seed, has six legs, and is tan to grayish-white. In persons with dark hair, the adult louse will look darker. Females, which are usually larger than the males, can live 3-4 weeks and deposit more than 100 eggs, at a rate of 6 eggs each day. Adult lice can live up to 30 days on a person's head. To live, adult lice need to feed on blood. If the louse falls off a person, it dies within 1 or 2 days.

What symptoms will my child have if he/she has head lice?

- Tickling feeling of something moving in the hair
- Itching, caused by an allergic reaction to the bites
- Irritability
- Sores on the head caused by scratching

How did my child get head lice?

- Head-to-head contact with an infested person is the most common way to get head lice.
- Head-to-head contact is common during play at home and school (sports activities, on a playground, slumber parties, at camp).
- Less commonly: coming into contact with objects that have recently come into contact with a person's head who has head lice; such as clothing, combs/brushes, bedding, or stuffed animals

How can I treat head lice?

Treatment is a 3-step process: use of a lice killing agent, nit removal, and environmental clean up.

Lice Killing Agent:

- The most important step in treating head lice is to treat the person and other family members with head lice medication to kill the lice.
- Head lice shampoo can be purchased at any drug store over-the-counter, or you may see your physician for a prescription, if preferred.
- FOLLOW THE DIRECTIONS COMPLETELY AND THOROUGHLY
- There are no over-the-counter or prescription treatments to kill head lice that are totally safe and scientifically proven to be 100% effective against head lice and nits.
- Since head lice shampoo may contain pesticides, do not retreat sooner than 7-10 days later if live lice continue to survive.

Nit Removal:

- THE BEST TREATMENT FOR REMOVING NITS IS MANUALLY, as complete nit removal is key to successful head lice treatment
- Work in a well lit area or use a flashlight and a magnifying glass.
- Divide the hair into sections and fasten off the hair that is not being worked on.
- Go through each hair section from the scalp to the end of the hair.
- Use your fingers to pull off any nits found
- Move to the next section of hair until the entire scalp has been checked
- Screen for nits and head lice every day for 10 days and then regularly thereafter

Environmental Clean Up:

- To kill lice on bedding, clothing, etc., wash in hot water and dry.
- Items that cannot be washed (stuffed animals, comforters, etc) should be placed and sealed into a plastic bag for 2 weeks
- Vacuum furniture and carpets
- Pesticide sprays are NOT recommended, as they have not been proven to be effective and they can be a health hazard.
- Combs, brushes, and hair accessories should be washed in HOT water to dislodge any lice or nits.

How Can I Prevent Head Lice?

- AVOID head-to-head contact during play at home and at school
- DO NOT share clothing, such as hats, scarves, coats, sports uniforms, or hair ribbons
- DO NOT share combs, brushes, or hair accessories.
- DO NOT lie on beds, couches, pillows, carpets, or stuffed animals that have recently been in contact with person who is known to have head lice