

## Head Lice Information

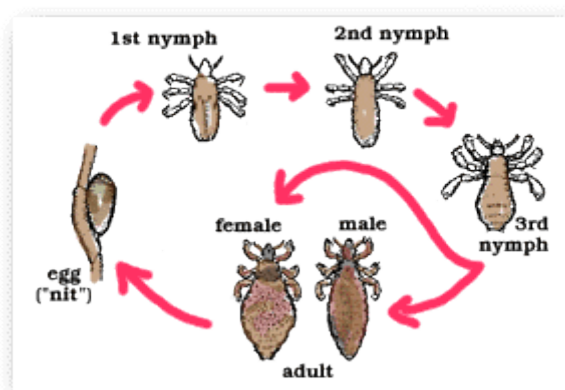
### What are head lice?

Head lice are parasitic insects that live in the hair and scalp of humans. They need human blood to survive. The scientific name for head louse is *Pediculus humanus capitis*. Another name for infestation with head lice is pediculosis.

Head lice develop in three forms: nits, nymphs, and adults.

- **Nits:** Nits are head lice eggs. They are hard to see and are often mistaken for dandruff or droplets of hairspray. Nits are found firmly attached to the hair shaft. They are oval and usually yellow to white. Nits take about 1 week to hatch.
- **Nymphs:** Nits hatch into nymphs. Nymphs are immature adult head lice. Nymphs mature into adults about 7 days after hatching. To live, nymphs must feed on blood.
- **Adults:** An adult louse is about the size of a sesame seed, has six legs, and is tan to grayish-white. In persons with dark hair, adult lice will look darker. Adult lice can live up to 30 days on a person's head. To live, adult lice need to feed on blood. If a louse falls off a person, it usually dies within 2 days.

### Which Came First... the Itchin' or the Egg?



(The Life-Cycle of the Head Louse)

### Where are head lice commonly found?

They are most commonly found on the scalp, behind the ears and near the neckline at the back of the neck. Head lice hold on to hair with hook-like claws

found at the end of each of their six legs. Head lice are rarely found on the body, eyelashes, or eyebrows.

### **Who is at risk for head lice?**

Anyone can get head lice. Pre-school- and elementary-school-aged children and their families are infested most often. Girls get head lice more often than boys, and women more often than men. Outbreaks of head lice can infest anyone, regardless of personal hygiene. Head lice like CLEAN heads the best!

### **How common is head lice infection?**

Head lice is a very common condition, especially among children ages 3-10. However, there are no reliable data on how many people get head lice in the United States each year. Outbreaks of head lice occur often in schools and group settings worldwide.

### **How are head lice spread?**

Head lice are spread easily from person to person by direct contact. People can get head lice by:

- Coming into close contact with an already infested person. In children, contact is common during play, while riding the school bus, and during classroom activities in which children sit in groups close to each other.
- Wearing infested clothing, such as hats, scarves, coats, sports uniforms, or hair ribbons.
- Using infested combs, brushes, or towels.
- Lying on a bed, couch, pillow, carpet, or stuffed animal that has been contaminated.
- Lice do not jump or fly. Lice are not spread to humans from pets or other animals.

### **How is head lice infestation diagnosed?**

Head lice infestation is diagnosed by looking closely through the hair and scalp for nits, nymphs, or adult lice.

Nits are the easiest to see. They are found "glued" to the hair shaft. Unlike dandruff or hairspray, they will not slide along a strand of hair. If you find nits more than 1/4 inch from the scalp, the infection is probably an old one.

Nymphs and adults can be hard to find. There are usually few of them, and they can move quickly from searching fingers. If lice are seen, finding nits close to the scalp confirms that a person is infested.

If you are not sure if a person has head lice, the diagnosis should be made by your health-care provider or school nurse.

### **What is the treatment for head lice infestation?**

Getting rid of head lice often requires treating the individual, the family, and the household. It is recommended that you call your physician and follow his/her advice on what product to use.

### **Follow these treatment steps:**

- Remove all clothing.
- Apply lice-killing shampoo/crème rinse, according to label instructions. If the affected person has extra-long hair, you may need to use a second bottle. **WARNING:** Do not use a creme rinse or combination shampoo/conditioner before using lice-killing medicine. Do not re-wash hair for 1-2 days after treatment.
- Have the affected person put on clean clothing after treatment.
- If some live lice are still found but are moving more slowly than before treatment, do not re-treat. Comb dead and remaining live lice out of the hair. The lice killing shampoo/crème rinse sometimes takes longer than the time recommended on the package to kill the lice.
- After treatment, if no dead lice are found and lice seem as active as before, the product may not be working. See your health-care provider for a different one. Follow treatment instructions.
- Remove nits and lice from the hair shaft using a nit comb. Flea combs used for cats and dogs can also be used.
- After treatment, check, comb, and remove nits and lice from the hair every 2-3 days.
- Re-treat in 7-10 days.
- Check all treated persons for 2-3 weeks until you are sure all lice and nits are gone.

### **Treat the household:**

- To kill lice and nits, machine wash all washable clothing and bed linens that the infested person touched during the 2 days before they were diagnosed. Wash clothes and linens in the HOT water cycle (130 F). Dry items on the hot cycle for at least 20 minutes.
- Dry clean clothing that is not washable (coats, hats, scarves, etc.). OR
- Seal all non-washable items (clothing, stuffed animals, comforters, etc.) in a plastic bag for 2 weeks.
- Soak combs and brushes for 1 hour in rubbing alcohol or Lysol, or wash with soap and hot water.
- Vacuum the floor and furniture. Do not use lice sprays; they can be toxic if inhaled.

### **How can head lice be prevented?**

Avoid direct contact with the head, hair, clothing, or personal belongings of a person with head lice.

Watch for signs of lice, such as frequent head scratching. Nits do not cause symptoms, but they can be seen on the hair shaft; they are yellow-white and oval-shaped.

Teach children not to share combs, brushes, scarves, hair ribbons, helmets, headphones, hats, towels, bedding, clothing, or other personal items.

Examine household members and close contacts of a person with head lice, and treat if infested.

When you find a case of head lice, tell others! Call your child's school or day care. Notify neighborhood parents.

### **What is our school policy on Head Lice?**

If your child is found to have nits and/or bugs, the parent is notified and the child is sent home with information about treatment. Your child may return to school if he or she has been treated and is nit and bug free.

### **Where can I find more information about head lice?**

[www.headlice.org](http://www.headlice.org)

[www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)

[www.hsph.harvard.edu/headlice.html](http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/headlice.html)