

HEAD LICE FACTS FOR PARENTS

Anyone can get head lice. About 6 million people in the United States get them each year. Head lice are NOT a sign of unclean people or homes. They have survived centuries of attempts to eradicate them! There is no special time of the year for head lice to appear.

Head lice outbreaks are common among children in day cares, schools, and institutions. Based on evidence-based research, classroom or school-wide screening for decreasing the incidence of head lice is not efficient. Checking siblings and close contacts has proven to be the most efficient and conclusive way to track lice. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) determined that “No-nits” policies that require a child to be free of nits before they can return to school are not recommended. Head lice are a nuisance, but they have not been shown to spread disease.

Simple Facts about Head lice

- Insect that crawls on the scalp and only on the scalp and lay eggs on hair strands.
- Flat, wingless, active, fast crawling; *cannot jump or fly!*
- Live only on humans; bite and suck blood from the scalp.
- Lice survival time off of a human host is 6-24 hours.
- They have a 30-day life cycle with the proper food and temperature (82-95 degrees F).
- They cannot live off of a human head for more than 48 hours.
- Females lay about 10 eggs a day, which hatch in 7-10 days.
- Eggs are cemented to the hair shaft close to the scalp. Eggs noted further down the hair shaft are usually empty or hold a dead louse.
- Eggs are usually grayish-white in color, oval-shaped and about this size (‘).
- Itching *may* occur 2-3 weeks **after** an irritation to the louse’s saliva has developed. (If itching is noticed, lice have probably been present for several weeks.)
- ***Lice are a nuisance problem but do not cause disease.***
- ***Direct head to head contact is responsible for almost all lice transfers.***

Check Your Child Regularly

- The web site: <http://www.liceandscabies.com/licemovie.shtml> has a very good video demonstrating how to check for lice and nits. The video was produced by a pharmaceutical company and we are not promoting the product, just the procedure for checking hair.
- ✓ Work under good light such as natural sunlight or a strong light source.
- ✓ Separate hair into small thin sections and begin at the top of the head. Work down the back of the head. Then start on the sides of the head and work from the top down until you have covered all areas of the head. Lice can be anywhere on the head but often prefer the area behind the ears and the crown of the head. Inspect small sections of hair at a time.
- ✓ Hair care product residues, dandruff, or hair casts can easily be removed from the hair by blowing, rubbing, or brushing. Lice eggs will not budge unless “picked” or removed with a fine tooth metal (not plastic) lice comb, or cut out the hair shaft with a small manicure scissors.

Children may attend school with eggs or nits in their hair and should not miss school as a result of nits in the hair. We do ask that you continue to remove any eggs that are close to the

scalp, in case they hold a live louse. If a louse hatches from an egg they are too immature to mate and will have difficulty moving from one head to another if given the chance! Frequent checks will allow you to detect these new lice and remove them before they reach the age in which they can cause problems.

Treatment for Head Lice

- There are many over the counter preparations for the treatment of lice. Remember that these products are not simply a shampoo. They also contain a chemical that kills lice, a pesticide (permethrin and pyrethrum)!
- You may want to call your health care provider or pharmacist if lice are found. Prescription products are also available. Tell the medical provider if the person has any allergies and if they or the person doing the treatment is pregnant.
- Check everyone in the household. Anyone with live lice MUST be treated on the SAME day.
- DO NOT TREAT SOMEONE “JUST IN CASE”. TREAT IF YOU FIND LIVE LICE ONLY!
- Head lice shampoos and products DO NOT kill all of the “baby” lice within the eggs attached to the hair shaft. The shampoos cannot penetrate the outer casing of the eggs. Eggs must be removed manually.
- Please inform school and anyone who has had close contact with the person who has lice (relatives, friends, playmates, babysitters, school, day care, etc.)

Getting Rid of Head Lice & Eggs

1. Kill the lice immediately

- Change the clothing of the person being treated **before and after treatment**.
- Wash the hair with lice shampoo/medication. Do not use conditioner or cream rinse. Any coating on the hair can make the medication less effective.
- **This shampoo is not like regular shampoo!** Use the lice-killing medication treatment according to the manufacturer’s *EXACT* instructions. Put the medication on *dry or almost dry hair if this is recommended*, especially on the back of the head where the lice and eggs are most likely to be found. Work the medication in as close to the scalp as possible.
- **DO NOT apply this shampoo in the bathtub or shower.** Use a sink to lean over and use a towel to protect the eye area.
- **DO NOT** use less or more medication/shampoo than the recommended amount (usually one bottle per person).
- **DO NOT** leave the medication/shampoo on longer than the recommended time.
- **DO NOT** wrap the head in plastic or cover the hair after the treatment is applied.
- **DO NOT** use lice-killing medication on pregnant women or children under 2 years of age. Remove lice and eggs by hand.
- Repeat the lice-killing treatment in **7-10 days** if product recommends. This helps eliminate any new lice that may be hatching from remaining eggs.
- **DO NOT** use the lice-killing medication more than once every 7 days.

Manual removal of lice and eggs is also considered a treatment. It is time consuming but is effective and does not expose a child who may be allergic to the shampoo, to an allergen. Children with severe hay fever should not have the shampoo used on them as the ingredients are derived from chrysanthemums.

Lice treatment medication kills live lice but does not kill all of the lice in the eggs.

2. Remove the Eggs

Work under good lighting such as natural sunlight. A magnifying glass can be used.

- Use a grooming comb or hairbrush to remove tangles. Concentrate on nits close to the scalp.
- Eggs or nits more than ¼ inch from the scalp are not considered a risk for the development of further live lice. These items are usually empty casings or have dead baby lice inside of them.
- Divide the hair into sections with hair clips, hold a section of hair and begin to comb the hair with a fine toothcomb starting as close to the scalp as possible. Dip the comb in water or use tissues to remove any lice, eggs or debris.
- A fine toothcomb may not remove the eggs. You may have to pinch your fingernails around the egg and pull it off the end of the hair strand. You can use safety scissors to snip off the strand if you prefer. Put the eggs and strands of hair in a plastic bag and throw it away.
- Continue to search for live lice even after you have used the medicated shampoo. It may take 10-25 minutes for lice killing medications to work. Use tweezers, fingernails, or tape to catch live lice and remove them from the scalp. Drop any live lice in a solution of soapy water, vinegar, or alcohol.
- Even under the best of conditions, a few eggs may be missed. These eggs do not pose a problem if they are farther away from the scalp. ***Check every 1-2 days for at least 2 weeks until all signs of eggs (that are ¼ inch or closer to the scalp) are gone (and use the vinegar solution, if necessary, to loosen eggs).***
- Soak the hair in a white vinegar solution (1/4 cup vinegar to 2 cups water) and wrap the hair for 30-60 minutes in a damp towel soaked in the same solution. Do not get the solution in eyes. This can be done on successive days **24 hours after** you have used the medicated shampoo. This solution helps loosen the “glue” that attaches the eggs to the hair shaft and makes the eggs easier to remove.
- ***Do Not*** treat a person with head lice ***more than 2 times*** with the same lice-killing medication. Use a different over the counter preparation or contact your health care provider or pharmacist for an alternate plan.
- Olive oil, salad oil, or petroleum jelly (Vaseline) ***may*** smother lice and eggs. **It is still necessary to comb or pick out lice and nits.** These alternative treatments should only be used if traditional steps are not effective. Shower caps and plastic wraps that are applied over these treatments must be used with discretion on older children and adults. To avoid choking or asphyxiation, ***do not*** use them on small children. The removal of these treatments from the hair can be difficult. Grease cutting shampoos or dish soap (Dawn) may be used to remove them. It may be necessary to shampoo twice. The use of powder (especially powders containing talc) to remove grease from the hair ***is strongly discouraged.***

3. Clean the Environment on the Same Day You Treat the Hair

- You may want to vacuum the car, children’s car seats (however if kept in the cold garage overnight, or parked in the hot sun, any lice on the seat or in the car will die). It is not necessary to vacuum rugs unless your children lay on them with their head on the rug it is highly unlikely that a louse will move from the carpet onto a child’s head. Upholstered furniture can be vacuumed thoroughly-but this is not always necessary.

- Wash clothing, coat, hat, gloves, towels and bedding that has been recently used (within the past 2 days) by the child. The pillow case may need to be changed and washed more often since this is the area head lice may be found if they have left the head.
- Cloth or stuffed toys worn or handled by a child with head lice, within the past 2 days, can be bagged and placed in the cold garage in the winter time or place them in a dryer and run them through a dry cycle. ***The extreme cold will kill lice and eggs. If it is warmer place them in the sun and the increased heat will also kill them*** Lice cannot live off of a human body for more than 48 hours. Use water that is at least 130 degrees or place articles in the dryer ***for at least 20 minutes*** at the hottest setting possible.
- Combs and brushes should be immersed in water that is at least 130 degrees or in rubbing alcohol, or hot ammonia water (1 tablespoon of ammonia to one quart of hot water) for at least 15 minutes. Scrub the teeth of the comb with a nailbrush or old toothbrush. Clean all combs before using them. It is recommended that each member of the family have their own comb and brush.
- It is not necessary or recommended that you hire an exterminator to treat the home.
- Spraying or fogging homes with insecticides or lice-killing sprays is ***not*** recommended.
- **REPEAT ANY NECESSARY CLEANING AGAIN IN 7-10 DAYS!**

You Can Get rid of Head Lice!!

- **Children should *NOT* miss more than one day of school due to head lice. Ask for help from family and friends when checking everyone, removing eggs, and cleaning your home. As long as there are live lice or eggs (closer than ¼ inch to the scalp) in a person's hair, head lice can occur again in the same child.**
- **The removal of eggs that are closest to scalp is a very important step. Spend MOST of your time doing this!**