

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT HEAD LICE



WHAT ARE HEAD LICE?

Head lice are tiny wingless insects that live on the scalp. They do not carry any diseases so are not a public health risk. Anyone can get head lice.

NITS

- Nits are eggs that are laid by a female louse and are firmly attached to the hair shaft.
- They are about the size of a pinhead and are often found along the forehead, back of the head and behind the ears and are within 1 cm of the scalp.
- The nits are grayish-white, tan or yellow. Some can be the same colour as hair, making them difficult to see.
- Nits hatch in 6-10 days.



ADULT LICE

- Lice are the size of a sesame seed and are tan to grayish-white in colour. They may look darker in people with dark hair.
- They need blood to survive and can live up to 30 days on the head but will die within 1-2 days if they fall off the head.



HOW IS HEAD LICE SPREAD?

- Head lice are spread mainly through direct head-to-head contact. When heads are close together lice crawl very quickly from one head to another. Lice cannot fly or jump.
- They may also be spread by sharing items such as combs and hats but this is less common.
- Head lice do not live on animals.



WHAT DO I LOOK FOR?

WATCH FOR

- Frequent itching and sores on the scalp from scratching.



There may be no symptoms. Check all family members for lice by:

- Using good lighting. Daylight is best, so try sitting by a window.
- Looking throughout the hair for lice. They can be difficult to see because they are small, hide within the hair and move very quickly.
- Using a magnifying glass and fine toothed comb can help.
- Looking for nits firmly attached to the hair shaft and within 1cm of the scalp. Part the hair into small sections and move from one side of the head to the other. Nits can be confused with dandruff or hair spray droplets-they will not fall off if touched.
- Nits will only come off if they are pulled off with your finger nails or nit comb.



TREATING HEAD LICE

Treat only the person who has head lice with a product that kills live lice. Treatment is available from your pharmacy (no prescription needed). Your pharmacist can help you choose a head lice product.

REMEMBER

Always remember to:

- Follow the label directions carefully.
- Avoid use of conditioning shampoo or conditioner before or 48 hours after using head lice treatment.
- Contact your health care provider or a pharmacist before using head lice treatment if you are pregnant, breastfeeding, have allergies or for a child under 2 years old.
- Treatment must be repeated again 7-10 days after the first treatment.



REMOVE

Remove all head lice and nits from hair:

- Use your fingernails to pull off the nits from the hair or use a head lice comb (metal ones work better than plastic). Repeat daily until there are no nits.
- Separate hair into sections then pick up a few strands at a time to remove nits.
- Check each section of the head closely before moving on (pay attention to behind ears, nape of the neck, and close to the scalp).



HOME

Treating the Home:

- Wash clothing and bedding used in the last 3 days by the affected person in hot water and dry in a hot dryer.
- Place items that cannot be washed in a sealed bag for two weeks.
- Put all combs, brushes and hair accessories in hot, soapy water.



Do not treat a person with head lice more than 2–3 times with the same shampoo if it does not seem to be working. Always seek the advice of your health care provider if this should happen. They may recommend a different product.

WHAT ABOUT OTHER TREATMENTS?

A number of household products such as mayonnaise, petroleum jelly, olive oil, tea tree oil, hair gel and vinegar or wet combing have been suggested as a treatment. These products show little proof of killing head lice and are not as effective as head lice shampoo.



FOR MORE INFORMATION

For more information, please visit us online at www.healthunit.org

Call 1-800-660-5853 for more information.

Websites:

- www.healthunit.org
- <http://www.cdc.gov/parasites/lice/head/>
- http://www.caringforkids.cps.ca/handouts/head_lice



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