

## Lice

### What are lice?

Head lice are six-legged wingless insects measuring between 2-3 millimeters, about the size of a sesame seed.

While they cannot jump or fly, head lice can crawl quickly along the hair shaft. As parasites, they depend on human blood for survival and must have a "blood meal" (at the scalp) every two to three hours to survive.

Nits hatch between one and two weeks after they're laid. Baby lice are known as nymphs, and they become adult lice between one and two weeks after hatching.

### How long do they last?

The female has a lifespan of up to 30 days, during which time she can produce between three and 10 eggs (nits) per day, attaching them to the hair shaft, generally close to the scalp where environments are the warmest.

Head lice can only live up to 48 hours off of a human head. Even though it may feel like your home is crawling with bugs, cleaning it does not need to be the extreme and exhausting road that many are quick to jump in to.

### What do they look like?

Nits may look like dandruff but can vary in color from whitish to tan to even reddish brown, making them hard for an untrained eye to recognize and see. They are attached to the hair with a sticky glue-like protein substance which forms a bond that is difficult to break without specialized products and techniques.

Adult lice mature to about the size of a sesame seed. They can vary in color from grayish white to reddish brown and have the ability to adapt their color to their environment.

Though very small, lice can be seen with the naked eye. Nymphs and nits are even smaller and it may require an expert to identify them with certainty.

### How common are they?

The CDC reports that somewhere between 6 and 12 million people in the United States are infested annually.

## Who gets lice?

Children from 3 to 11 years old are particularly susceptible, no one is immune and anyone can get head lice.

All socioeconomic classes are affected.

Some research concludes that girls are more commonly infested, but neither hair length nor personal hygiene is a predictive factor. Lice, in fact, prefer clean hair, since it's easier to adhere to than oily hair.

No one knows why some people are more prone than others to having head lice, but blood type and Rh factor seem to be elements.

Once someone gets lice, the possibility of getting them again, especially in the short term, has proven to be greater.

## **Treating Lice**

### Where do I get products to rid lice from myself or another?

Grocery stores and many drug stores (Walgreens, Rite Aid, etc) carry products, prescription products are also available. Natural remedies exist, but may not be as effective. A doctor can provide best recommendation for products.

Specialized products that immobilize the live lice and nymphs and then break the bond between the hair and the glue-like substance that holds the nit to the hair shaft must be used.

The only way to ensure that lice and nits are completely removed is to manually remove them. This process involves going strand-by-strand through the hair to ensure that nothing is left over.

Be aware of any products that claim to kill head lice and their eggs. There is no such product available to consumers that can safely kill head lice and their eggs available to consumers. Most often these products are toxic and NOT safe for our heads. Additionally, research proves that NO product can kill lice eggs (nits).

### Follow these treatment steps:

- 1 Before applying treatment, it may be helpful to remove clothing that can become wet or stained during treatment.
- 2 Apply lice medicine, also called pediculicide, according to the instructions contained in the box or printed on the label. If the infested person has very long hair (longer than shoulder length), it may be necessary to use a second bottle. Pay special attention to

instructions on the label or in the box regarding how long the medication should be left on the hair and how it should be washed out.

- 3 **WARNING:** Do not use a combination shampoo/conditioner, or conditioner before using lice medicine. Do not re-wash the hair for 1–2 days after the lice medicine is removed. These measures may reduce the effectiveness of the lice medications.
- 4 Have the infested person put on clean clothing after treatment.
- 5 If a few live lice are still found 8–12 hours after treatment, but are moving more slowly than before, do not retreat. The medicine may take longer to kill all the lice. Comb dead and any remaining live lice out of the hair using a fine-toothed nit comb.
- 6 If, after 8–12 hours of treatment, no dead lice are found and lice seem as active as before, the medicine may not be working. Do not retreat until speaking with your health care provider; a different pediculicide may be necessary. If your health care provider recommends a different pediculicide, carefully follow the treatment instructions contained in the box or printed on the label.
- 7 Nit (head lice egg) combs, often found in lice medicine packages, should be used to comb nits and lice from the hair shaft. Many flea combs made for cats and dogs are also effective.
- 8 After each treatment, checking the hair and combing with a nit comb to remove nits and lice every 2–3 days may decrease the chance of self-reinfestation. Continue to check for 2–3 weeks to be sure all lice and nits are gone. Nit removal is not needed when treating with spinosad topical suspension.

Retreatment is meant to kill any surviving hatched lice before they produce new eggs. For some drugs, retreatment is recommended routinely about a week after the first treatment (7–9 days, depending on the drug) and for others only if crawling lice are seen during this period.

### Cleaning the Home

What cleaning measures are necessary in my home?

Completely eliminating head lice requires diligent nit picking and lice removal from the head not fine combing the carpet. So the good news is you don't need to waste valuable time and expense with excessive cleaning!

Cleaning the home falls into four parts:

1. Bagging items for 48 hours
2. Vacuuming
3. Washing &/or Drying on High Heat
4. Soaking in Boiling Hot Water for 10 Minutes

**FIRST:** Where have heads touched the last 48 hours?

- Pillows
- Sheets
- Blankets
- Stuffed Animals
- Hats
- Coats
- Helmets
- Couches
- Floors
- Car Seats
- Combs
- Brushes
- Hair Accessories

**SECOND:** Which items are more difficult to wash and can easily be bagged?

- Pillows
- Blankets
- Stuffed Animals
- Helmets

**THIRD:** Which items can easily be vacuumed?

- Floors
- Couches
- Car Seats

**FOURTH:** Which items can be washed and/or dried easily?

- Sheets
- Clothes (hats, coats – or bag them)
- Items can be put in the dryer on high heat for 20-30 minutes without being washed

**FIFTH:** Which items can be put in hot water (130 F) for 10 minutes?

- Combs
- Brushes
- Hair Accessories

It is common for shampoo to work, but many families may not clean the environment as well as they should and re-infestation occurs.

Hats, scarves, pillow cases, bedding, clothing, and towels worn or used by the infested person in the 2-day period just before treatment is started can be machine washed and dried using the hot water

and hot air cycles because lice and eggs are killed by exposure for 5 minutes to temperatures greater than 53.5°C (128.3°F).

Items that cannot be laundered may be dry-cleaned or sealed in a plastic bag for two weeks.

Items such as hats, grooming aids, and towels that come in contact with the hair of an infested person should not be shared.

Vacuuming furniture and floors can remove an infested person's hairs that might have viable nits attached.

### Prevention

Prevention is key, and after head lice have been effectively removed, there are ways to help keep them away. Following these preventive measures reduces the risk of re-infestation:

1. **Notifying everyone that you have come into contact with is very important. Be a friend, Tell a friend! *THERE IS NO SHAME IN HAVING HEAD LICE!***  
Unless all those that have been in contact with the person that has had head lice have been checked and treated, the outbreak will continue.
2. Clean your home, personal belongings and car. There is no need to spend enormous time, energy or money on this exercise. The lice do not live for long periods of time off the scalp.
3. Keeping hair up in ponytails or braids are extremely effective preventive measures.
4. Running a lice comb through the hair once or twice a week is a helpful way to stay on top of potential re-infestations or catch a new case in its infancy. In addition, after your treatment, continue to perform a head-check at home. It is recommended that you do so frequently for all family members.
5. Discourage children and family members from sharing hair tools and accessories (such as brushes, combs, ponytail holders, headbands, etc.), clothes, towels, hats, scarves and similar items.

### School

Exclusion is warranted "when a student has the signs and symptoms of infestation (the most specific being the presence of a live louse)."

Students must receive proper treatment and parents must bring children to the school office to be checked before being re-admitted to school. "Received proper treatment" means the treatment was initiated, and someone checked them when they returned to school and they have no live bugs.