



Head Lice Fact Sheet



What are head lice?

Head lice are small bugs the size of a sesame seed that feed on blood from the scalp that cannot survive without a blood meal for more than a day.

What are the signs & symptoms of head lice?

Itching in areas with head lice is a common symptom, typically starting 4 to 6 weeks after lice infestation. Itching occurs behind the ears or at the back of the neck and can persist even after the lice are removed.

How are head lice treated?

The most effective head lice treatment is medicine (consult a doctor first). After treatment, comb out nits and eggs every 2 to 3 days for 2 to 3 weeks.

How can I check my child for head lice?

Regular checks can help spot head lice before they multiply. Here's how:

1. Seat your child in a well-lit room.
2. Part their hair and inspect the scalp in sections.
3. Look for crawling lice and nits. Live lice move quickly and avoid light, while nits are small white or yellow-brown specks attached firmly to hair, usually at the hairline, neck, or behind ears.
4. Use a fine-tooth comb to assist in the search.

Nits (empty egg cases) can be mistaken for dandruff or dirt, but they are firmly attached to the hair.



Egg (nits)
in hair

Are head lice contagious?

Head lice spread quickly from person to person. They crawl and cling to hair and spread through head-to-head contact, and sharing clothing, bed linens, combs, brushes, and hats.

Do kids have to stay home from school?

Please follow your school's policies and procedures regarding return to school.

Guidelines for safe lice treatments:

Follow treatment package directions exactly. An adult should apply the medicine, rinsing it off over a sink with warm water. Never let children apply the medicine, and never place plastic bags on their heads. Do not leave a child alone with medicine in their hair. Store medicine in a locked cabinet, out of reach. Consult your child's doctor before changing treatments or if you have questions.

Will they ever be gone?

If lice persist on your child, it may be due to remaining nits, continued exposure, or ineffective treatment. Contact a doctor if lice persist after 2 weeks of treatment or if the scalp appears infected.

How can we prevent head lice from spreading?

Wash bed linens, stuffed animals, and clothing used in the past 2 days in hot water (130°F/54.4°C) and dry on high heat for 20 minutes. Dry clean or seal non-washable items in airtight bags for 2 weeks. Vacuum carpets and upholstered furniture, and dispose of the vacuum bag. Soak or discard hair-care items and discourage sharing them. Check all family members and treat anyone with lice. Advise children to avoid head-to-head contact. Check close contacts every 3-4 days and treat if lice or nits are found.

What else do I need to know?

Remind your child that while having lice can be embarrassing, anyone can get them. Having head lice is not a sign of dirtiness or poor hygiene.

Sources

kidshealth.org/en/parents/head-lice.html,
healthychildren.org/English/health-issues/conditions/from-insects-animals/Pages/Signs-of-Lice.aspx,
cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/Pages/BodyLice.aspx



Egg (nit)



Nymph



Adult