



# Communicable Diseases

## PEDICULOIS (LICE)

### What are Head Lice?

Head lice are small insects that live on the scalp of humans. While they may be found **anywhere** on the head, they prefer to live on the scalp along the neckline and behind the ears. When lice bite the scalp they cause tickling or itching.



Head lice are very small – each one is about the size of a sesame seed. They are usually grayish white or grayish brown. Some may even take on the color of the person's hair. Lice are usually hard to see because they move so quickly.

Lice lay eggs called 'nits'. Nits are small, white and oval. Lice lay the nits on the hair close to the scalp, attached with a cement-like, waterproof substance so they cannot be washed out or flicked off like dandruff.



Head lice are not a health hazard, a sign of poor hygiene and do not spread disease. They are a nuisance and cause a high level of anxiety.

### How do you get Head Lice?

**Anyone** can get head lice. Uncleanliness does **not** cause head lice. Head lice cannot jump or fly and you cannot get them from animals or pets. They are frequently found in school classrooms and

day care centers because of the closeness of children and their belongings.

You get lice by having close head to head contact with someone who has head lice. Contact with personal items belonging to an infested person (combs, brushes, hats, etc.) occurs rarely. This is because lice found on these items are likely to be injured or dead. Healthy lice are not likely to leave a healthy head unless there is a heavy infestation.

### How Can You Tell if You Have Head Lice?

**Determining that a person has head lice requires the detection of live head lice.** The presence of nits indicates a past infestation that may not currently be active. It is common to mistake dandruff, hairspray drops, scabs or dirt for lice and nits.

If your child scratches his or her head frequently or if you hear that one of your child's friends or classmates has head lice, you should check for live lice on your child's scalp. **Treat only when live lice are detected.**

Parents should check their child's head for lice and nits weekly throughout the school year, before and after a sleepover, and daily during an outbreak. Children should learn how head lice are spread and how to avoid them.

### Why aren't children sent home if they have head lice?

Head lice in classrooms do not spread as much as previously thought. Studies show that children without active head lice were sent home than were children who were infested. A child with active head lice likely has had them for a month or more by the time it is discovered, and poses little risk to others. They should remain in school, but be discouraged from close direct head contact with others.



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## What is the best way to find Head Lice?

1. Apply ample conditioner to dry hair, enough to soak from the scalp to the end of the strands.
2. Remove tangles with a regular comb.
3. Start behind the ears and comb the hair section by section with a fine tooth lice comb. Separating the hair with hair clips is helpful.
4. Place the lice comb against the scalp and pull to the end of the hair.



5. Check the comb for lice after each pull, wipe the comb with a tissue each time and look for lice as well. Put tissues in a bag.

**Or**

6. Pull off individual nits by grasping nits between the fingertips and sliding off the end of hair strand.
7. Place in bag and dispose.
8. Check all hair over the entire head.
9. Repeat combing of entire head at least 5 times.
10. When finished, tie the bag with tissues and throw into garbage.
11. If treatment is required, make sure all conditioner is washed out of the hair.

## What is the treatment for Head Lice?

All who show signs of live **lice** should receive treatment that is appropriate for them. Recommended treatment is with a topical insecticide (pyrethrins, permethrin 1% or lindane, or a recently approved non-insecticidal product called Resultz) that kills the lice. These and other products are available at most drugstores. It is very important to read and follow the instructions carefully to ensure the product will be more effective.

Most products are not effective against nits (eggs) and they will continue to hatch. This means live lice may be found close to a week following

treatment. A second treatment is required 7 days after the first to kill the newly hatched lice before they are able to lay eggs.

If live lice are found 24-48 hours after the first treatment, the first treatment didn't work and a second product should be used.

## What household cleaning is recommended?

Cleaning of items in contact with the head may be warranted (hats, pillowcases, brushes and combs).

- Wash the item in hot water, drying in a hot drier for 15 minutes, or
- Store in a plastic bag for 2 weeks or in the freezer for 24 hours

Excessive cleaning in the house is not necessary since head lice and nits cannot survive for long periods of time away from a host.

## NOTE:

- **Rinsing with vinegar is not effective against head lice.**
- **Use of kerosene on the hair is not safe and is not recommended.**
- **Shaving the head to get rid of lice is not necessary.**

## What are the side effects of treatment?

Each product has different risks and side effects (either based on age, medical conditions, including pregnancy or breastfeeding, or history of allergies). It is important to review each product before choosing.

Reactions range from scalp irritation (including itching or burning) to allergic reactions to possible neurotoxicity and seizures.

