

Head lice is a very common problem among school-age children, and though it certainly is not life-threatening, it is a nuisance problem that no one wants to have in their family. By working together, we can eliminate head lice from our school population.



***What are head lice?***

The head louse is a small, grayish-white insect about 1/16 to 1/8 of an inch in length that lives in hair and on the scalp. The nits (eggs), larvae, and adult lice can be easily seen and are often found near the nape of the neck and around the ears.

***Who gets head lice?***

Anyone may get head lice under the right conditions. They are often found in children who are in elementary school and day care. Head lice occur in all socioeconomic groups and are not a sign of uncleanness. Lice can only survive for about half a day without a human host and they cannot live on family pets. They do not live in human hair other than on the head.

***How are lice spread?***

The spread of head lice can happen during close personal contact with a person who has head lice. Head lice are wingless insects that move relatively quickly, which is why they spread easily from person to person. However, they do not jump or hop. They can also be spread by sharing combs, brushes, hats, caps, wigs, curlers, or other headgear, or by storage of items in a shared locker or the hanging of coats, etc., side by side.

***What are the symptoms of head lice?***

Itching is the most common symptom of head lice infestation, but children may not always complain of itching. A tickling feeling that something is moving in their hair. A thorough examination of the hair and scalp is necessary to find head lice or nits. Nits are firmly attached to hair shafts near the scalp and will not fall off when touched like dandruff or flakes of dried hair spray, gels, or other hair products.

***What is the treatment for head lice?***

Medicated shampoos or cream rinses are used to kill lice. They are available over-the-counter in most pharmacies or grocery stores, or by prescription from your doctor. Some shampoos are not recommended for infants, young children, or women who are pregnant or breast feeding. Always follow the directions on the label of the product. Most products should be used again in seven to ten days to make sure any lice which hatched after the first treatment are killed. Special fine-toothed combs are usually available with the shampoo or rinse to aid in removing nits, but removing the nits by pulling them off the hair strands between your fingernails works best.

***What can be done to prevent the spread of head lice?***

1. Contacts of people with head lice should be checked for nits or lice and treated as necessary. Children should also be taught not to share combs, brushes, hats, etc.
2. Clothing, sheets, blankets, and bedspreads should be washed in hot water and dried in a dryer to destroy lice and their eggs. Dry cleaning or storing clothing in plastic bags for ten days is also effective for objects which cannot be laundered.
3. Combs, brushes, and similar items can be treated by soaking them for 5-10 minutes in a pan of water heated to 128 degrees F or soaking them for one hour in the medicated shampoo or rinse.
4. Cleaning of carpets or furniture can be done by simple vacuuming. It is not necessary to buy commercial sprays to treat furniture. Fumes from such sprays may be harmful to people and pets.
5. Regular inspection for head lice in children attending elementary school or day care is recommended.
6. In some cases, Lice are resistant to many commonly used products. If your child has been treated as directed by a product and still has lice, seeing a physician to confirm the diagnosis may be necessary. Your physician can advise you concerning additional treatment.

***Where can you get more information?***

Your Personal Doctor

CDC: [http://www.cdc.gov/parasites/lice/head/gen\\_info/index.html](http://www.cdc.gov/parasites/lice/head/gen_info/index.html)

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