



Guideline for Treatment—Head Lice

What are head lice?

Lice are tiny parasitic insects that can live and breed on a human's head. They do not spread disease or pose any hazard to you or your child's health. Head lice only live and breed on the human head, not on your pets.

What are the signs of head lice?

- Tickling feeling of something moving in the hair
- Itching
- Irritability and difficulty sleeping; headlice are most active in the dark
- Sores on the head caused by scratching
- Sometimes there are no symptoms at all

How are head lice spread?

- Lice move quickly, making them hard to see. They do not jump or fly but crawl and quickly move from one head to another when heads touch.
- Lice can also be spread by sharing items such as combs, brushes, bike or other helmets, hats, or coats that have been in contact with someone who has head lice.
 - They can also be spread by lying on a bed, couch, pillow, or carpet that has recently been in contact with an infested person.
- House pets do not transmit head lice.

How do I find head lice?

- Parents should check their children often for signs of lice.
- Finding and treating head lice early will shorten treatment time and help prevent spread to others.
- One adult louse can make up to ten eggs in 24 hours. These eggs, often called nits, are very tiny –about half the size of the head of a pin. Use of a magnifying lens and a fine-toothed comb may be helpful in finding live lice.
 - If crawling lice are not seen, finding nits firmly attached within a ¼ inch of base of the hair shafts strongly suggests, but does not confirm, that a person is infested and should be treated.
 - If you are unsure, the diagnosis should be made by a health care provider, local health department, or your school nurse or other person trained to identify live head lice.

How are head lice treated?

- There are many ways to treat head lice. Getting rid of lice can take a lot of time. There are no shortcuts to treatment. **All live insects must be killed and nits (eggs) continually removed until the cycle is broken and all nits are gone.**

Treatment

Commercial Products

- Head lice shampoo and cream rinse can be bought from the drugstore. Example products: NIX, RID, A-200, Lice Arrest, Not Nice to Lice
- Some head lice products are covered by a prescription from your doctor.
- Only family members with living lice or nits should be treated.
- Before using a head lice product, the hair must be very clean. Wash hair thoroughly with a shampoo that does not contain a conditioner, crème rinse or softener. Rinse well with water only. Follow the instructions on the product label for when to begin using regular shampoo again.
- These products can be harmful if used too often or incorrectly. Follow the instructions on the product label. Discuss the use of lice shampoo with your doctor if there is a chance of pregnancy and in usage with young children. Most products recommend waiting at least one week before re-treatment.
- Always apply the lice treatment product over the sink or tub to avoid getting the chemicals on other parts of the body.
- If a few live lice are still found 8-12 hours after treatment, but are moving more slowly than before, do not re- treat. 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.
 - 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 re-treat until speaking with your health care provider. A different lice medication may be needed.

Treatment (continued)

Home or Natural Remedies

- There are various home recipes and natural products such as petroleum jelly, mayonnaise, tea-tree oil, and olive oil that can be used but they only kill active lice. They have no effect on nits.
- Bleach, kerosene, gasoline or garden insecticides are very dangerous and should never be used to treat lice.
 - *Non-toxic treatments are being marketed. Some examples are: Lice Ice, Ulesfia™. Always consult with your health care provider with any specific questions as these products may not be as effective.*

Removing Nits (eggs)

Removing the nits (eggs) is the most important step in treating head lice. Most head lice products only kill about 75% of nits. The rest need to be removed by hand. It may take several hours to remove all nits.

- Use a metal or plastic fine-toothed comb to remove tangles in the hair.
- Look closely for very tiny eggs next to the scalp.
- Take hold of a small section of hair. With your fingernail, remove the egg by sliding it down to the end and off the hair shaft or cut the hair shaft between the nit on the shaft and scalp.
- Place nits in a garbage bag, tie shut, and throw away.
- Check for nits daily for at least ten days following treatment.

Cleaning up Around the House

- Wash all bedding, towels, mattress pad, and clothing worn in the past three days (including jackets and hats). Use hot, soapy water and dry in a dryer on high heat.
- Place items that can't be washed or dry cleaned (stuffed animals, comforters) in plastic bags or trash bags and seal for three weeks.
- Vacuum furniture, rugs, floors, mattresses, and inside vehicles. Empty vacuum bags and throw away.
- DO NOT share combs, brushes, hats, bike helmets, etc. Soak combs, brushes, and other hair accessories in hot water at a temperature greater than 130 degrees Fahrenheit for ten minutes.

Resources

- If you have questions, please contact your doctor, school nurse or the Health Department.