

HEALTH INFORMATION FOR PARENTS

Head Lice (Pediculosis)

Head Lice are often a fact of life for children. Lice are spread by head to head or close personal contact. School activities do not include this kind of contact. Parents should check their children's heads regularly when shampooing or combing hair or if the child complains of itching particularly behind the ears or at the nape of the neck. Lice are not a health hazard or due to poor hygiene. Anyone can contract head lice. Head lice are only transmitted from human to human. You cannot get lice from pets.

Lice do not fly or jump. Their eggs (nits) are cemented to hair shafts and do not fall. Live lice can crawl. They do not transmit disease; however they are a public health nuisance. If a household member is identified to have head lice, all members of that household should be checked. Only individuals with head lice should be treated. Your physician and/or pharmacist will assist you in determining what treatment is available for you to treat head lice.

The Illinois State Board of Education, the Illinois Department of Public Health, the Center for Disease Control, the American Academy of Pediatrics, the National Association of School Nurses, and the Harvard School of Public Health recommend that the management of pediculosis (head lice) should **not** disrupt the educational process or result in excessive absence from school.

Schools in the East Aurora School District will follow the following procedures when a student in school is identified with head lice:

- When lice/nits are found on a child in school, the parents are notified and the child is sent home.
- The child may return to school (usually the next day) with proof of treatment. Proof of treatment may be a physician's statement, receipt for the product used or the box top from the product used.
- The child will be checked by the school nurse or health assistant and return to class.
- Students do not need to be nit free, but should not have evidence of viable lice.
- If a student meets the definition for chronic head lice infestation, an informational meeting with the parent should be scheduled by the School Nurse
- School personnel are encouraged to send children individually to the health office to be checked if the child is exhibiting signs or symptoms of head lice.
- Anonymous reports about children are not responded to by health staff.

Head Lice 101

What You Should Know About Head Lice

Overview

Head lice are a common community problem. An estimated 6 to 12 million infestations occur each year in the United States, most commonly among children ages 3 to 11 years old. Children attending preschool or elementary school, and those who live with them, are the most commonly affected.¹

Head lice are not dangerous.¹ They do not transmit disease, but they do spread easily, making it a community issue.¹ Additionally, despite what you might have heard, head lice often infest people with good hygiene and grooming habits.^{2,3} Your family, friends or community may experience head lice. It's important to know some basics, including how to recognize symptoms and what to do if faced with an infestation.

What Are Head Lice?

Head lice are tiny, wingless insects that live close to the human scalp. They feed on human blood.¹ An adult louse is the size of a sesame seed. Baby lice, or nymphs, are even smaller. Nits are the tiny, teardrop-shaped lice eggs. They attach to the hair shaft, often found around the nape of the neck or the ears. Nits can look similar to dandruff, but cannot be easily removed or brushed off.¹

Fast Facts

- **An estimated 6 to 12 million infestations occur each year among U.S. children 3 to 11 years of age¹**
- **Head lice often infest people with good hygiene^{2,3}**
- **Head lice move by crawling; they cannot jump or fly¹**
- **Head lice do not transmit disease, but they do spread easily¹**
- **If you or your child exhibits signs of an infestation, it is important to talk to your doctor to learn about treatment options**

How Are Head Lice Spread?

- Head lice move by crawling and cannot jump or fly.¹
- Head lice are mostly spread by direct head-to-head contact – for example, during play at home or school, slumber parties, sports activities or camp.¹
- It is possible, but not common, to spread head lice by contact with items that have been in contact with a person with head lice, such as clothing, hats, scarves or coats, or other personal items, such as combs, brushes or towels.¹
- Head lice transmission can occur at home, school or in the community.¹

What Are the Signs & Symptoms of Infestation?

Signs and symptoms of infestation include¹:

- **Tickling** feeling on the scalp or in the hair
- **Itching** (caused by the bites of the louse)
- **Irritability** and difficulty sleeping (lice are more active in the dark)
- **Sores on the head** (caused by scratching, which can sometimes become infected)

Finding a live nymph or adult louse on the scalp or in the hair is an indication of an active infestation. They are most commonly found behind the ears and near the neckline at the back of the head.⁴



NIT



Nymph



Full-Grown Louse

What If My Child Gets Head Lice?

If you suspect your child might have head lice, it's important to talk to a school nurse, pediatrician or family physician to get appropriate care. There are a number of available treatments, including new prescription treatment options that are safe and do not require nit combing. Other things to consider in selecting and starting treatment include:

- Follow treatment instructions. Using extra amounts or multiple applications of the same medication is not recommended, unless directed by healthcare professional.⁵
- Resistance to some over-the-counter head lice treatments has been reported. The prevalence of resistance is not known.^{6,7}
- There is no scientific evidence that home remedies are effective treatments.⁸
- Head lice do not infest the house. However, family bed linens and recently used clothes, hats and towels should be washed in very hot water.⁴
- Personal articles, such as combs, brushes and hair clips, should also be washed in hot soapy water or thrown away if they were exposed to the persons with active head lice infestation.⁴
- All household members and other close contacts should be checked, and those with evidence of an active infestation should also be treated at the same time.⁴

References

- ¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Parasites: Lice: Head Lice: Frequently Asked Questions. http://www.cdc.gov/parasites/lice/head/gen_info/faqs.html. Accessed October 12, 2012.
- ² Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Parasites: Lice: Head Lice: Diagnosis. <http://www.cdc.gov/parasites/lice/head/diagnosis.html>. Accessed January 27, 2012.
- ³ Meinking T, Taplin D, Vicaria M. Infestations. In: Schachner LA, Hansen RC, eds. *Pediatric Dermatology*, 4th ed. Mosby Elsevier; 2011:1525-1583.
- ⁴ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Parasites: Head lice: Epidemiology And Risk Factors. <http://www.cdc.gov/parasites/lice/head/epi.html>. Accessed June 30, 2012.
- ⁵ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Parasites: Lice: Head lice: Treatment. <http://www.cdc.gov/parasites/lice/head/treatment.html>. Accessed October 12, 2012.
- ⁶ Burkhart CG. Relationship of treatment resistant head lice to the safety and efficacy of pediculicides. *Mayo Clin Proc.* 2004;79(5):661-666.
- ⁷ Meinking TL, Serrano L, Hard B, et al. Comparative in vitro pediculicidal efficacy of treatments in a resistant head lice population on the US. *Arch Dermatol.* 2002;138 (2):220-224.
- ⁸ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Parasites: Lice: Head lice: Treatment Frequently Asked Questions. http://www.cdc.gov/parasites/lice/head/gen_info/faqs_treat.html. Accessed October 18, 2012.

Myths & Facts About Head Lice

Myth: Only dirty people get head lice.

Fact: Personal hygiene or household or school cleanliness are not factors for infestation. In fact, head lice often infest people with good hygiene and grooming habits.^{2,3}

Myth: Head lice carry diseases.

Fact: Head Lice do not spread diseases.¹

Myth: Head lice can be spread by sharing hairbrushes, hats, clothes and other personal items.

Fact: It is uncommon to spread head lice by contact with clothing or other personal items, such as combs, brushes or hair accessories, that have been in contact with a person with head lice.¹

Myth: Head lice can jump or fly, and can live anywhere.

Fact: Head lice cannot jump or fly, and only move by crawling. It is unlikely to find head lice living on objects like helmets or hats because they have feet that are specifically designed to grasp on to the hair shaft of humans. Additionally, a louse can only live for a few hours off the head.¹

Myth: You can use home remedies like mayonnaise to get rid of head lice.

Fact: There is no scientific evidence that home remedies are effective treatments.⁸ A healthcare provider can discuss appropriate treatment options, including prescription products.

- ⁹ Parison J, Canyon DV. Head lice and the impact of knowledge, attitudes and practices – a social science overview. In: *Management and Control of Head Lice Infestations*. UNI-MED, Bremen, Germany, 2010:103-109.
- ¹⁰ Gordon SC. Shared vulnerability: a theory of caring for children with persistent head lice. *J Sch Nurs.* 2007;23(5):283-292.
- ¹¹ Gordon S. Management of head lice in school settings. Presented at the Florida Association of School Nurses conference, Orlando, FL, February 7, 2009.
- ¹² National Association of School Nurses. Pediculosis management in the school setting. Position statement. January 2011. <http://www.nasn.org/PolicyAdvocacy/PositionPapersandReports/NASNPositionStatementsFullView/tabid/462/smid/824/ArticleID/40/Default.aspx>. Accessed July 8, 2012.
- ¹³ Schoessler SZ. Treating and managing head lice: the school nurse perspective. *Am J Manag Care.* 2004;10(suppl 9):S273-S276.
- ¹⁴ Frankowski BL, Bocchini JA, Jr, Council on School Health and Committee on Infectious Diseases, American Academy of Pediatrics. Clinical report – head lice. *Pediatrics.* 2010;126(2):392-403.

Facing Head Lice

A Guide For Families

What Are Head Lice?

Head lice are one of the most common communicable conditions. An estimated 6 to 12 million infestations occur each year in the United States, most commonly among children ages 3 to 11 years old. Live lice feed on human blood and live close to the human scalp. They are not dangerous and do not transmit disease, but they are contagious.¹



NIT



Nymph



Full Grown Louse

References

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Parasites: Lice: Head Lice: Frequently Asked Questions. http://www.cdc.gov/parasites/lice/head/gen_info/fags.html. Accessed October 12, 2012.
- Meinking T, Taplin D, Vicaria M. Infestations. In: Schachner LA, Hansen RC, eds. *Pediatric Dermatology*. 4th ed. Mosby Elsevier; 2011:1525-1583.
- CDC. Parasites: Lice: Head lice: Epidemiology and Risk Factors. <http://www.cdc.gov/parasites/lice/head/epi.html>. Accessed June 30, 2012.
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- Burkhardt CC. Relationship of treatment resistant head lice to the safety and efficacy of pediculicides *Mayo Clin Proc*. 2004;79(5):661- 666.
- Meinking T, Serrano L, Hard B, et al. Comparative in vitro pediculicidal efficacy of treatments in a resistant head lice population on the US. *Arch Dermatol*. 2002;138(2):220-224.
- CDC. Parasites: Lice: Head lice: Treatment Frequently Asked Questions. http://www.cdc.gov/parasites/lice/head/gen_info/fags_treat.html. Accessed October 18, 2012.

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Fast Facts

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- Head lice often infest people with good hygiene^{2,3}
- Head lice move by crawling; they cannot jump or fly¹
- Head lice do not transmit disease, but they do spread easily¹
- It is important to talk to your school nurse, pediatrician or family physician to learn about treatment options

Head lice often infest people with good hygiene and grooming habits.^{2,3} Children in preschool or elementary school, and those who live with them, are the most commonly affected.¹

You may see different forms of head lice when checking or treating your child: eggs, baby lice and adult lice. The eggs, also called nits, are tiny, tear-drop shaped eggs that attach to the hair shaft. They are often found around the nape of the neck or the ears. Nits may appear yellowish or white, and can look similar to dandruff. Nymphs, or baby lice, are smaller and grow to adult size in one to two weeks. Adult lice are the size of a sesame seed and tan to grayish-white.¹

How Did My Child Get Head Lice?

Head lice are wingless insects and cannot jump or fly. They move by crawling, and are mostly spread by direct head-to-head contact – for example, during play at home or school, slumber parties, sports activities or camp. It is also possible, but not common, to spread head lice by contact with clothing, such as hats, scarves, coats or other personal items, such as combs, brushes or towels.¹

As you and your family deal with this uncomfortable but common issue, keep in mind that head lice infestations are not related to cleanliness and can occur in all socioeconomic groups.^{2,3}

My Child Has Head Lice. Now What?

If head lice are found in your child's hair or scalp, it's important to talk to your school nurse, pediatrician or family physician to get appropriate care. Not all people experience symptoms. Head lice can cause itching and lack of sleep (lice are more active in the dark).¹ There are a number of available treatments, including new prescription treatment options that are safe and do not require combing out nits from your child's hair. You may want to remove nits for aesthetic reasons. Other things to consider in selecting and starting treatment include:

- Follow treatment instructions. Using extra amounts or multiple applications of the same medication is not recommended, unless directed by a healthcare professional.⁴
- Resistance to some over-the-counter head lice treatments has been reported, but the prevalence of resistance is not known.^{5,6}
- There is no scientific evidence that home remedies are effective treatments.⁷
- Family bed linens and recently used clothes, hats and towels should be washed in very hot water.⁴
- Personal articles, such as combs, brushes and hair clips, should also be washed and sanitized or thrown away if they were exposed to a person with head lice.⁴

All household members and other close contacts should be checked, and those with evidence of an active infestation should also be treated at the same time.⁴

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Myth: You can use home remedies like mayonnaise to get rid of head lice.

Fact: There is no scientific evidence that home remedies are effective treatments.⁷ You should talk to your health care provider about treatment options, including prescription products that are currently available.