

HEAD LICE FACTS

Head Lice

- Pediculus humanus capitus, known as head lice, are small, wingless insects with six legs.
- An adult louse is about the size of a sesame seed and is usually gray or tan in color.
- They can't jump or fly, only crawl or drop from hair or objects.
- They can live on a human head for up to 30 days.
- Adult lice can only live for approximately 24-48 hours off a human because they need to feed on human blood.
- A female louse can lay 60-100 eggs in her lifetime.
- Head lice do not carry disease, but overuse of products and extreme itching may cause rashes or infections.
- Animals do not carry head lice.
- Personal hygiene or cleanliness in the home or school has nothing to do with getting head lice.

Nits

- Head lice eggs are called nits.
- Nits are laid by the adult female and are cemented to the base of the hair shaft.
- A nit is about the size of a grain of salt and oval-shaped.
- Nits are grayish white or translucent in color and stick to the hair shaft.
- A nit will not flick off of the hair shaft and can be mistaken for dandruff, hair spray droplets or dirt particles.
- Nits can hatch in 7-10 days and grow into adult lice that may lay more eggs.
- Nits are generally found close to the scalp, usually around the ears and the nape of the neck, but can be found anywhere on the head.
- Nits firmly attached within ¼" of the base of the hair shaft strongly suggest, but do not confirm, that a person is infested and should be treated. If no live lice are seen, and the only nits are found more than 1/4" from the scalp, the infestation is probably old and no longer active and does not need to be treated.

Itching

- Head lice inject a small amount of saliva and take a small amount of blood when they feed. The saliva causes an allergic reaction with itching at the site of the bites. Severe itching may not start for 4 to 6 weeks because it takes time to become sensitive to the saliva.

Transmission

- Head lice are usually passed from person to person by direct head to head contact. Occasionally, they are passed by sharing clothing (such as hats, scarves, coats, or sports uniforms) or articles (such as hair ribbons, barrettes, combs, brushes, towels, or stuffed animals) that were recently used by an infested person. They can also be passed by lying on a bed, couch, pillow, or carpet that has recently been in contact with an infested person.

HEAD LICE IDENTIFICATION AND TREATMENT

STEP 1: CHECKING FOR HEAD LICE

Use a good light source and look through **all** household members' hair, especially behind the ears and near the back of the neck. Treat only the people who have head lice or nits.

STEP II: PREPARING TO TREAT HEAD LICE

Many over-the-counter head lice treatments are available in grocery stores and pharmacies. You can ask your pharmacist, school nurse, local health department, or physician for advice on which products to use. Natural products and alternative treatments such as food oils and hair gels that act by suffocating the louse have been suggested and marketed to consumers. Please consult a health care professional before using non-standard or unregulated treatment products.

Do Not Use:

- Flammable substances such as gasoline, kerosene, or rubbing alcohol
- Motor oils
- Pet flea shampoo
- Electric clippers-although hair cutting or shaving may remove many nits and lice, the psychological impact on the child should be considered.
- Oral antibiotics
- Don't over-treat with any head lice shampoo. Follow product recommendations.
- Don't switch products during the week, hoping "more is better".
- Products containing Pyrethrin (A-200, Pronto, R & C, Rid, Triple X) should not be used by those with a diagnosis of asthma or having allergies to ragweed or chrysanthemums.

STEP III: TREATING THE HAIR

Head lice treatment should be done on clean hair. (Hair should be shampooed with non-conditioning shampoo and no conditioner used.) It is important to follow the lice treatment product's directions, including a second treatment if instructed to do so. Many commercial products are powerful pesticides and may be toxic if used incorrectly.

Many products cannot be used on children under 2 years of age. Pregnant and nursing mothers should consult their health care professional before using any product.

STEP IV: NIT REMOVAL

Hillsboro School District has a No Live Lice protocol to attend school. Also, if nits are found close to the scalp, our protocol also requires the student be treated and nit removal attempted because:

- Nit removal may prevent over-treatment.
- Nit removal within ¼" of the scalp may prevent being re-infested.

Nit removal involves:

- Have the person sit on a non-upholstered chair or stool.
- Make sure there is good lighting available, such as a bright lamp or sunlight.
- Check the hair in small sections for nits and live lice.
- Separate sections with hair clips or bobby pins.

- Each nit must be snagged firmly by fingernails or lice comb, slid down the hair shaft and disposed of in the sink, on tape, or in a plastic bag.
- If a comb is used, it is easier done on wet hair. Dip the comb in water periodically to remove any lice and nits.
- The process can take a long time depending on how many lice/nits are present. Books and videos can help pass the time.
- Have the person put on clean clothes that were not exposed to lice.
- Daily head checks are recommended for 2-3 weeks to be sure that all lice and nits are gone.

STEP V: CLEANING THE ENVIRONMENT

- Wash and dry all recently worn (in the 48 hours before treatment) clothing, bedding and towels in hot water (130 degrees and hot air cycle).
- Items that are unable to be washed can be dry cleaned, placed in an airtight sealed plastic bag for 2 weeks or placed in the freezer for 48 hours.
- Vacuum recently used furniture, floors and car seats.
- Wash combs, brushes and hair accessories in hot water daily.
- The use of pesticide sprays is strongly discouraged.

STEP VI: PREVENTION AND FOLLOW-UP

- Avoid head-to-head (hair-to-hair) contact.
- Do not share personal items such as combs, brushes and hair accessories.
- Use your own pillow and sleeping bag for sleepovers.
- Do not share coats, hats or other articles of clothing.
- Check your child's head regularly for head lice.

**If live lice are still seen after a full course of treatment, contact your health care provider.

www.cdc.gov/parasites/lice/head