

Head Lice Fact Sheet

What are head lice?

Head lice are parasitic insects that can be found on the head of people. Head lice feed on human blood several times a day, and live near the scalp. Head lice lay eggs, called nits, on the hair shaft, very close to the scalp. Nits further than ¼ inch from the scalp are likely dead/hatched. Lice do not spread disease.

What are the symptoms of head lice?

- Tickling, feeling something moving in your hair
- Itching, caused by an allergic reaction to the louse bite
- Irritability and difficulty sleeping; lice are most active in the dark
- Sores on the head caused by scratching (which can lead to secondary bacterial infection)

How do you get rid of head lice?

- Examine everyone in the home for lice and nits. Look carefully through the hair and at the scalp, behind the ears, and the back of the neck. Nits are easier to see than live lice.
 - Treat only the household members who have lice. Use products available over-the-counter (according to package directions) or by prescription (according to physician directions).
 - Comb the hair after treatment, using a special lice/nit comb. Separate the hair into sections and try to comb every nit and louse you can. Live nits that are not combed out will hatch within 7-10 days.
- Combing is the most time-consuming step, but also the most important.**

Clean around the house. Lice do not live long without a host to feed on. However, to pick up any stray hairs that may have a live nit attached, wash and dry clothes, sheets, pillow cases, and towels using hot water and high heat. Vacuum the floor and furniture to pick up loose hairs. Combs and brushes can be soaked in hot water for 5-10 minutes.

Follow the lice treatment product directions for when to retreat. It is usually recommended to retreat 7-10 days after the initial treatment. Continue to check heads daily until 1 week after second treatment or 1 week after last louse or nit is removed.

How are head lice spread?

Head lice are spread by direct contact with the hair of an infested person. The highest risk involves head-to-head contact. Lice crawl; they do not jump, and they do not have wings. Spread by contact with clothing or other personal items is fairly uncommon. Personal hygiene and cleanliness have nothing to do with getting head lice.

How are head lice prevented?

- Teach children to avoid head-to-head (hair-to-hair) contact during play at home, school, and elsewhere (sports activities, playground, sleepovers, camp).
- Avoid sharing clothing (hats, scarves, coats)
- Avoid sharing brushes, combs, and hair accessories

Is there a season for head lice?

September is National Head Lice Awareness Month. Head lice incidences peak shortly after school starts particularly among young children. This is most likely due in part to younger children playing closely together and having head-to-head contact. During the winter season, the sharing of coats and hats may contribute to head lice occurrences. As spring comes, outdoor playing and sports activities bring children close together. Summertime often means summer camps and sleepovers which can lead to the spreading of head lice. So it seems as if there is no “one” season for head lice. Year round awareness and routine family inspection will help prevent head lice occurrences.

Resources:

Center for Disease Control & Prevention-<http://www.cdc.gov/parasites/lice/head/index.html>

Texas Department of State Health Services-<http://www.dshs.state.tx.us/schoolhealth/lice.shtm#2>