

Head Lice: A Real Head Scratcher

Fact Sheet for Parents

Each year approximately 6 to 12 million children between the ages of 3 and 12 years of age are infested with head lice.¹ While the odds of your son or daughter developing head lice are relatively small, the following includes useful information on how to spot and treat this condition.



What are head lice?

Head lice are small parasitic insects that survive by removing small amounts of blood from the scalp every few hours.¹ Generally found close to the scalp, primarily around the ears and at the back of the neck, the adult louse is about the size of a sesame seed and can be the color of your child's hair.¹ Eggs, or nits, are smaller and are silver in color.¹

What are the symptoms of head lice?

The most common symptom of head lice is itching caused by an allergic reaction to the louse saliva. There may be redness or sores caused by scratching. Your child may be irritable and experience sleeplessness.²

How common are head lice?

About one in every 100 U.S. elementary school children will be infested with head lice in any given year.³ Infestation can occur throughout the year, although a peak is generally experienced during summer and back-to-school time periods. Girls are more likely than boys to become infested because of sharing personal hair items.¹

How do you get head lice?

Lice are "equal opportunity" parasites. They infest all socioeconomic groups, races, genders and ages, but are more commonly found in children due to their close contact with each other.¹ While head lice are not considered an infectious disease, spread from one child to another can occur primarily through direct head to head contact or secondarily through the sharing of personal items such as hats, scarves, helmets, brushes, combs or pillows.¹ It is important for you to know that lice are not a sign of poor hygiene and they do not spread disease. If someone in your child's class at school develops head lice, there is no reason to panic and automatically assume that your child will "catch" head lice.

How do I know if my child has head lice?

Diagnosis of head lice is made on the basis of symptoms and confirmed through the identification of a live louse on the head. If your child is scratching his or her head, and you see red bite marks, sores, lice or nits on their scalp, he or she should be examined by a medical professional.³

How do I prevent head lice?

While preventing head lice entirely can be difficult, children should avoid head to head contact during lice outbreaks. Secondly, parents should discourage their children from sharing personal items such as hats, scarves, headbands, helmets, brushes, combs or pillows to decrease the likelihood of spread from one person to another. All recently worn clothing, hats, bedding, and towels used by anyone having lice or thought to be exposed to lice can be washed in hot water (130°) or dry cleaned. Personal care items such as combs, brushes and hair clips should also be washed in hot water. Toys such as stuffed animals can be placed in a hot dryer for 30 minutes or in a plastic bag for 2 weeks.⁴

How can I treat head lice?

Treatments for head lice include:

- Over-the-Counter (OTC) products
- Prescription products
- Alternative therapies — natural and herbal. These products have not been proven effective and are not regulated by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA).^{5,6}
- Nit picking (hair combing) with a fine-tooth comb is often used to remove the nits (eggs) from the hair. Combing takes time and patience. While it may remove the eggs or empty shells, alone, it is not considered an effective treatment for head lice.⁶

Many approved products are safe and effective but like all medical treatments, they must be used as directed by parents. Also, studies have shown that head lice are learning to outsmart many pesticides and are developing resistance to OTC pyrethrin and pyrethroid products, in much the same way that some bacteria have developed resistance to antibiotics.⁶

If a child is suspected of having head lice, he or she should be examined by a medical professional.³

This program is supported through an educational grant to the National Association of School Nurses from Shionogi Pharma, Inc.

1. Hansen RC (September 2004). Overview: The State of Head Lice Management and Control. *Am J Manag Care*, 10, S260-S263. ■ 2. CDC Fact Sheet. <http://www.cdc.gov/lice>. Accessed April 12, 2010. ■ 3. Pollack RL. The Role of the School in Battling Head Lice. *Our Children Magazine*. <http://www.oha.org/2153.htm>. Accessed April 10, 2010. ■ 4. CDC Headlice Treatment. <http://www.cdc.gov/lice>. Accessed April 12, 2010. ■ 5. Frankowski BL (September 2004). Overview: The State of Head Lice Management and Control. *Am J Manag Care*, 10, S269-272. ■ 6. Burkhardt CG. Relationship of Treatment-Resistant Head Lice to the Safety and Efficacy of Pediculicides. *Mayo Clin Proc*. 2004;79:661-666.

Oregon Community Unit School District #220

206 South Tenth Street
Oregon, Illinois 61061

TREATMENT AND CONTROL OF HEAD LICE

Your child has been found to have head lice. Lice spread from person-to-person easily and quickly, but only through direct contact, since they can't jump or fly. Head lice do not carry disease, and their presence does *not* mean that your child or your home are dirty. *Anyone* can have head lice.

In order to prevent further spread of lice, school policy and the Illinois Department of Public Health require that your child be kept home from school until the following steps have been taken.

Your child may return to school if:

- You bring your child in the day after treatment, and bring the empty lice treatment container as proof that an effective treatment was used.
- the school nurse checks your child's hair and finds **NO** viable nits still attached to the hair. If viable nits are found, you will need to take your child back home and try again to get rid of all nits.

There is no need for your child to miss more than one day of school if you take all of the steps listed below:

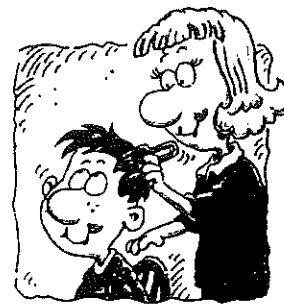
1. **PURCHASE** a lice-killing shampoo or conditioner.
 - No prescription is needed, unless you prefer one.
 - Be sure the special nit-removing comb is included.
 - Treatments available include: A-200, Rid, R&C, Nix.



2. **TREAT** all persons in the household on the same day.
 - Follow directions carefully. Do not use the treatment more than once in the same day. However, you should use the treatment again in 7-10 days (but no sooner).
 - Pregnant women and infants under 18 months should not use lice treatment without checking with a doctor.

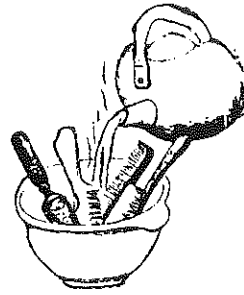


3. **REMOVE ALL NITS.** These are the tiny eggs laid by lice. They will be found right up against the scalp and are cemented onto one hair (very hard to pull off).
 - Work in bright daylight or a very bright lightbulb.
 - Use a nit comb, set deep into hair, starting at the scalp.
 - Part hair into sections, & check small areas at a time.
 - Nits are oval, pearly-off-white or tan, and about the size of a grain of sugar.
 - Most nits will be found around ears, neck & crown of head, especially under ponytails and braids.
 - Some nits will have to be pulled out with fingernails, or the individual hair snipped off to remove the nit.
 - Rinsing the hair with vinegar or the product "Clear" will help to loosen the nits so they will comb or pull out easier.

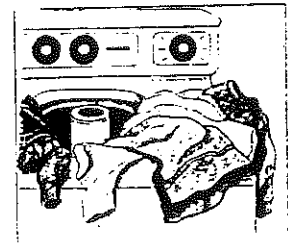


*While all lice treatments kill all lice, **NONE** of them will guarantee killing all nits. The only guarantee against a new infestation of hatched nits is to get all nits out of the hair.*

4. COMBS, BRUSHES and items like hair ribbons & holders must be treated by soaking in a pan of water at 140° for 10 minutes or in a solution of the lice treatment product.



5. CLOTHES, TOWELS, & BED LINENS must be washed in hot water and machine dried at the hottest setting. Don't forget hats and coats!

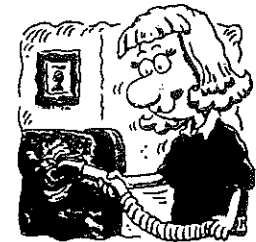


6. NON-WASHABLE items (pillows, stuffed animals, throw pillows, bookbags, dolls with hair, etc.) may be treated in one of three ways:

- 1) put through a 20 min. hot dryer cycle, OR
- 2) dry-cleaned, OR
- 3) sealed in a plastic bag for no less than 21 days.



7. MATTRESSES, CARPETING, RUGS, & FURNITURE need to be vacuumed thoroughly. After vacuuming, take vacuum bag out, seal it in a plastic bag and put it out of the house.

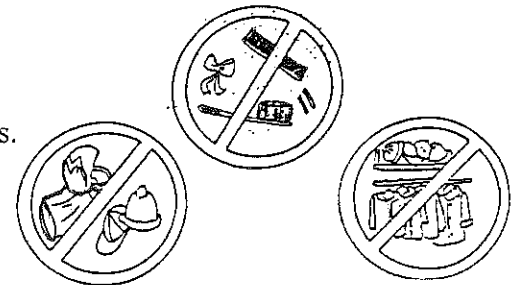


8. CAR, VAN OR TRUCK should be vacuumed thoroughly. Dispose of vacuum bag as above.

9. INFORM all relatives, neighbors and friends with whom your child has been in close contact for the past two weeks, so they can check for lice and be treated immediately, too. They will like you much better if you inform them than if you don't!

10. PREVENT the spread of lice to others:

- DO NOT borrow or share combs, brushes, barrettes ribbons, headbands, ponytail holders or other hair items.
- DO NOT borrow hats, helmets, scarves or pillows.
- DO NOT stack or hang your coat or hat touching clothing of other people.
- CHECK your child's head on a regular basis for lice. Watch for the main symptom: *itching*.



NOTE: Lice-killing sprays are available, but they are expensive and not necessary. The Illinois Department of Public Health recommends that you do not use them because breathing in the fumes can be harmful.

NOTE: Pets do not have to be treated. Lice will not live on pets. The kind of lice that live on animals will not live on people.

PLEASE NOTE that if meeting all of the above requirements causes a hardship for you financially or otherwise, please talk with the nurse at your child's school for assistance (even with checking heads).

Occasionally treatment for head lice seems not to be working. Most of the time, this is because *one of the above steps was not followed carefully.*

The following is an alternative **Olive Oil Treatment** to use, which has been very successful:

- STEP 1: Use a lice product to kill the lice. Remove all dead lice and dry the hair.
- STEP 2: The olive oil treatment
- Saturate all hair and scalp with olive oil. (Do not use any other oil. Olive oil washes completely out of the hair, but other oils do not do so easily.)
 - Cover the hair with a plastic cap or bag, and leave on for 8 hours (or overnight).
- STEP 3: Comb through the hair to remove all nits while the oil is still in it. Then wash the hair with regular shampoo.
- STEP 4: REPEAT the oil treatment on days 1, 5, 9, 13, 17 and 21; combing to remove any remaining nits each time. *If you miss any of the days, you will need to start the process over from day 1.*
- STEP 5: Clean the environment. Do all of the laundry and cleaning steps listed in the regular treatment program (Steps 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, & 9).

The olive oil kills by covering the holes through which the lice breathe. If lice aren't completely covered by oil, they may not die. But the oil will slow them down, allowing them to be caught in the nit comb. If the pediculicide fails to kill a bug, it means that bug is resistant and *will never be killed by that chemical*, no matter how many times you use it. This is not true of olive oil. Each time you use the olive oil, it has a good chance of killing each bug.

The olive oil treatments have been carefully aimed to coincide with the life cycle of the louse. If you choose not to use a pediculicide, use the olive oil treatment on Day 1 and Day 2 in addition to all other designated days.