

Pediculosis (Head Lice) FACT SHEET

- Head lice are parasitic insects that live in the hair and scalp of humans. They need human blood to survive.
- Head lice are spread easily from head to head by direct contact.
- Head lice can infest anyone, regardless of personal hygiene.
- Head lice are usually treatable with lice-killing shampoos and cream rinses.
- To prevent infection:
 - avoid direct contact with the head, hair, clothing, or personal belongings of a person with head lice, and
 - treat affected persons, their contacts, and their households.

How are head lice spread?

Head lice are spread easily from person to person by direct contact. People can get head lice by:

- Coming into close contact with an already infested person. In children, contact is common during play, while riding the school bus, and during classroom activities in which children sit in groups close to each other.
- Wearing infested clothing, such as hats, scarves, coats, sports uniforms, or hair ribbons.
- Using infested combs, brushes, or towels.
- Lying on a bed, couch, pillow, carpet, or stuffed animal that has been contaminated.
- Lice do not jump or fly. Lice are not spread to humans from pets or other animals.
- **Lice cannot survive longer than 24 hours when not in contact with the human head.**

What are the signs and symptoms of head lice?

- Itching -- the body's allergic reaction to the bite.

How is head lice infestation diagnosed?

- Head lice infestation is diagnosed by looking closely through the hair and scalp for nits, nymphs, or adult lice.
- Nits are the easiest to see. They are found "glued" to the hair shaft. Unlike dandruff or hairspray, they will not slide along a strand of hair. If you find nits more than 1/4 inch from the scalp, the infection is probably an old one.
- Nymphs and adults can be hard to find; there are usually few of them, and they can move quickly from searching fingers. If lice are seen, finding nits close to the scalp confirms that a person is infested. If you are not sure if a person has head lice, the diagnosis should be made by a health-care provider or school nurse.

What is the treatment for head lice infestation?

- Consult with your pediatrician regarding treatment.
- Treat based on the shampoo manufacturer's directions.
- Check hair and remove nits for a period of two weeks after treatment using a lice comb.
- Continue to check family members weekly to prevent a reoccurrence.

How do I treat the household?

- To kill lice and nits, machine wash all washable clothing and bed linens that the infested person touched during the 2 days before they were diagnosed. Wash clothes and linens in the HOT water cycle. Dry items on the hot cycle for at least 20 minutes.
- Dry clean clothing that is not washable (coats, hats, scarves, etc.). OR
- Seal all non-washable items (clothing, stuffed animals, comforters, etc.) in a plastic bag for 2 weeks.
- Soak combs and brushes for 1 hour in hot water.
- Vacuum beds, upholstered furniture, rugs and car seats. When finished, discard the vacuum bag.

How common is head lice infection?

Head lice is a very common condition, especially among children ages 3-10. As many as 6 million to 12 million people worldwide get head lice each year. Outbreaks of head lice occur often in schools and group settings worldwide.

How can head lice be prevented?

- Outbreaks of head lice have nothing to do with a family's income, social status, or level of personal hygiene.
- Avoid direct contact with a person who has lice, or with their clothing or personal belongings.
- Watch for signs of lice, such as frequent head scratching. Nits do not cause symptoms, but they can be seen on the hair shaft; they are yellow-white and oval-shaped.
- Teach children not to share combs, brushes, scarves, hair ribbons, helmets, headphones, hats, towels, bedding, clothing, or other personal items.
- Examine household members and close contacts of a person with head lice, and treat only if infested.