

LICE

Many people associate lice with unclean people or homes. This is **not** true in the case of head lice. Frequent bathing and shampooing will not prevent lice nor eliminate them once they are established. **Lice cannot jump** or fly, and are usually transmitted by contact with an infested person or by wearing infested clothing or using an infested hairbrush or hairbows. Children should therefore be warned against sharing hats, clothing or hairbrushes with others. Household **pets do not transmit lice**.

Lice are small insects about the size of a sesame seed. They are usually light brown but can vary in color. They move quickly and shy away from the light, making them difficult to see. Diagnosis is more often made on the basis of finding nits eggs . Nits are tiny, yellowish white oval specks attached to hairshafts. As she deposits her eggs 3 4 per day , the female louse cements them to the hairs unlike lint or dandruff, they will not wash off or blow away. Nits can be found throughout the hair, but are most often located at the nape of the neck, behind the ears, and frequently on the crown. It helps to use a magnifying glass and natural light when looking for them.

REDUCING THE RISK OF GETTING HEAD LICE

DO NOT share combs, brushes, hair bows/bands, helmets or headphones.

DO NOT trade hats, scarves, coats or sweaters.

DO NOT share or trade any other clothes or head gear.

DO NOT attend a sleepover if you have lice.

DO NOT use products intended for animals.

DO wash your combs and brushes often.

DO inspect your child's head regularly especially before and after a group activity such as birthday parties and sleepovers.

DO check children who are scratching their heads frequently.

DO vacuum upholstered furniture, rugs and floors frequently.

DO change bedding frequently.

DO bring your own pillow/sleeping bag to sleepovers.

DO notify the school immediately each and every time you suspect a family member has head lice. Also notify any groups, neighbors, friends, playmates, or daycares that have been in contact with members of your family that have head lice. **Notification of other people could prevent reinfestation of your own family.**

SYMPTOMS AND TREATMENT

The itching that occurs when lice bite and suck blood from the scalp, is the primary symptom of infestation, although not everyone will experience the itching. Children seen scratching their heads frequently should be examined at once. Often red bite marks or scratch marks can be seen on the scalp and neck. In severe infestations, a child may develop swollen glands in the neck or under the arms.

Before one family member is treated, all should be examined. Those showing evidence of infestation should all be treated at the same time. Individual treatment is a two step process involving the use of a lice killing shampoo **and** a special combing tool made just for nit removal.

1. Remove the child's shirt and provide a towel to **cover the eyes**. This is essential. **Do not treat in the bathtub or shower**, but instead have the child lean over the sink this confines the lice product to the scalp/neck . Be sure to follow the package instructions carefully some products must be applied to **dry hair**. **Do not use hair conditioners or crème rinses**, or shampoos with conditioners, before applying the lice killing shampoo. Wash towels immediately after treatment.
2. Always consult a doctor first if you are pregnant, nursing or allergic to weeds, plants, etc. Never use lice product on a baby. Your doctor can give you information on alternative treatments. Also consult a doctor before treating anyone with extensive cuts or scratches on the head or neck.
3. Remove all nits which will remain on the hair after treatment . This is essential! Lice shampoos rarely kill all the nits, and survivors will hatch into crawling lice within 7 to 10 days, starting the cycle of self reinfestation. Even dead nits will cling to the hair and cause uncertainty about reinfestation. Nit removal can be done with a special metal nit comb, or by picking them out with your fingernails usually this is most effective . **Incomplete nit removal is the most common cause of reinfestation.**

Note: Some so called lice combs are actually cradle cap combs and are ineffective against nits. Nit combing is best accomplished with hair that is dry or slightly damp. Your child will be rechecked upon arrival to school to be sure all nits have been removed.

1. Following nit removal, have the child put on clean clothing. Change and wash all bed linens immediately.

2. A daily nit check is advisable for at least 10 days following a treatment. You may need to retreat in 7-10 days if there is evidence of new nits or newly hatched lice. Remember, regardless of precautions taken at home, reinfestation from others can still take place. Recheck heads after child spends time with others.
3. Check **all** family members including you.
4. Machine wash all washable items which have been in contact with the infested person during the last three days. Articles should be washed in HOT water and dried in a HOT dryer. Non washables can be put in a hot dryer only for 20 minutes if heat will not harm them. Things which cannot be washed or dried can be sealed in a plastic bag for 14 days, or dry cleaned. Include helmets, headphones, sleeping bags, stuffed animals, hairbows, etc.
5. Combs and brushes and headbands/clips can be soaked in lice shampoo for one hour, or 150 degree water for 5-10 minutes.
6. Rugs, cars, floors, couches, upholstered chairs and mattresses should be carefully vacuumed to pick up any living lice or nits attached to fallen hairs. Immediately throw out vacuum bag.

CAN IT HAPPEN AGAIN?

Unfortunately, yes. There is no immunity from lice. So if you get rid of them once and don't want them to come back, follow all the steps of treatment. Lice can spread very quickly in a community. If they get into your family, don't be embarrassed, just get rid of them. Call your doctor or school nurse for help.