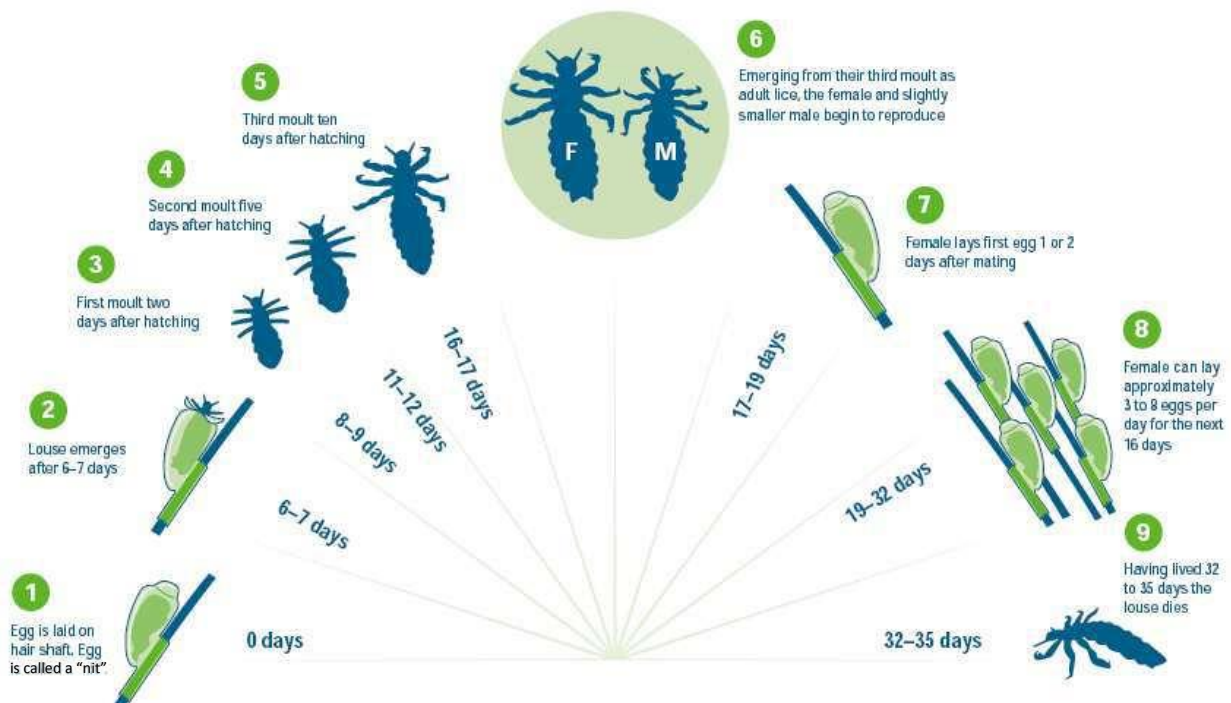


# Life Cycle of Head Lice



## Nits/Eggs:

Head lice begin their lives as eggs, or "nits." The female adult head louse may lay an average of five eggs per day.\* Eggs are attached singly to a hair shaft with a "glue" that is resistant to chemical and mechanical dislodgement. Eggs are normally cemented to the shaft of the hair very close to the scalp. Nits are oval or teardrop-shaped and may range in color from white, yellow, or tan to gray, depending upon age and whether or not the egg has hatched or been killed by head lice treatments. It is thought that eggs attached to hairs greater than one-quarter inch from the scalp have either already hatched, or will not hatch.

## Nymphs:

Eggs spend seven to ten days incubating close to the scalp before hatching to release the first nymphal stage. Nymphal stage head lice look very much like a miniature adult louse. The newly hatched nymph will crawl and seek a place to feed immediately. There are three nymphal stages punctuated by molting (the shedding of exoskeleton or "skin"). The three nymphal stages last about 8-12 days. 🦟

## Adults:

The final molt leads to an adult stage where body growth stops and sexual maturation occurs. Adult head lice continue to feed on blood every three to six hours. There are separate sexes in head lice, and females must mate and be fertilized in order to produce viable eggs. A mated female can continue to produce eggs for the duration of her life, which is about 30 days. She can lay an average of five eggs daily during this period.

\*Takano-Lee et al. (2003). In Vivo and In Vitro Rearing of *Pediculus humanus capitis* (Anoplura: Pediculidae, J. Med. Entomol., 40 (5): 628-635.