

# Head Lice Facts

1. **What are head Lice?** – Head lice or *Pediculus humanus capitis* are parasitic insects found on the heads of people. Having head lice is very common.

2. **Who is at risk for getting head lice?** - Anyone who comes in close contact (especially head-to-head contact) with someone who already has head lice is at risk. Occasionally, head lice may be acquired from contact with clothing (such as hats, scarves, coats) or other personal items (such as brushes or towels) that belong to an infested person. Preschool and elementary-age children, 3-11, and their families are infested most often. Girls get head lice more often than boys, women more than men. In the United States, African-Americans rarely get head lice. Personal hygiene or cleanliness in the home or school has nothing to do with getting head lice.

3. **What do head lice look like?** - There are three forms of lice: the egg (also called a nit), the nymph, and the adult.

a. Nits are very small, about the size of a knot in thread, hard to see, and are often confused for dandruff or hair spray droplets. Nits are laid by the adult female at the base of the hair shaft nearest the scalp. They are firmly attached to the hair shaft. They are oval and usually yellow to white. Nits take about 1 week to hatch. Eggs that are likely to hatch are usually located within 1/4 inch of the scalp.

b. The nit hatches into a baby louse called a nymph. It looks like an adult head louse, but is smaller. Nymphs mature into adults about 7 days after hatching. To live, the nymph must feed on blood.

c. The adult louse is about the size of a sesame seed, has six legs, and is tan to grayish-white. In persons with dark hair, the adult louse will look darker. Females, which are usually larger than the males, lay eggs. Adult lice can live up to 30 days on a person's head. To live, adult lice need to feed on blood. If the louse falls off a person, it dies within 2 days.

4. **Where are head lice most commonly found?** - They are most commonly found on the scalp, behind the ears and near the neckline at the back of the neck. Head Lice hold on to hair with hook-like claws found at the end of each of their six legs. Head lice are rarely found on the body, eyelashes, or eyebrows.

5. **What are the signs and symptoms of head lice infestation?** - Tickling feeling of something moving in the hair. Itching, caused by an allergic reaction to the bites. Irritability. Sores on the head caused by scratching. These sores can sometimes become infected

6. **How did my child get head lice?** - Contact with an already infested person is the most common way to get head lice. Head-to-head contact is common during play at school and at home (sports activities, on a playground, slumber parties, at camp). Less commonly, people can get head lice by wearing clothing, such as hats, scarves, coats, sports uniforms, or hair ribbons, recently worn by an infested person. Other ways people could get Head Lice include using

infested combs, brushes, or towels or by lying on a bed, couch, pillow, carpet, or stuffed animal that has recently been in contact with an infested person.

**7. How is head lice infestation diagnosed?** - An infestation is diagnosed by looking closely through the hair and scalp for nits, nymphs, or adults. Finding a nymph or adult may be difficult; there are usually few of them and they can move quickly from searching fingers. If crawling lice are not seen, finding nits within a 1/4 inch of the scalp confirms that a person is infested and should be treated. If you only find nits more than 1/4 inch from the scalp (and don't see a nymph or adult louse), the infestation is probably an old one and does not need to be treated. If you are not sure if a person has Head Lice, the diagnosis should be made by your health care provider, school nurse, or a professional from the local health department.

The following links are may be helpful with any additional questions regarding lice:

- <http://www.cdc.gov>
- <http://www.dhpe.org/infect/lice.html>
- <http://health.state.pa.us>

## **How to Treat Head Lice**

A head lice infestation should not be a source of embarrassment to either parent or child, since lice can infest anyone. The important thing is that you treat your child promptly and correctly.

### **PLEASE FOLLOW THESE INSTRUCTIONS**

1. Check with your physician and follow his/her instructions for treatment. There are numerous treatments available. Most do not require prescriptions.
2. After treatment is completed, comb child's hair with a fine tooth comb (usually in package) to remove remaining nits (eggs). It may be necessary to pull them out with your fingers.
3. To kill lice and nits, machine wash all washable clothing and bed linens that the infested person wore or used. Use the hot water cycle (130°) cycle. Dry clothes using high heat for at least 20 minutes. Store all clothing, stuffed animals, comforters, etc. that cannot be washed or dry cleaned into a plastic bag: seal for two weeks.
4. Soak combs and brushes for one hour in rubbing alcohol, Lysol, or wash with soap and hot (130°) water.
5. Vacuum furniture and carpets frequently. Lice sprays can also be used where washing and vacuuming are not practical.
6. All family members should be checked and treated as appropriate.
7. Inspect your child's hair daily for several weeks.