



Lice (Head)

Head lice are a common problem for children in child care settings and schools. Anyone can get head lice—they are not a sign of being dirty. There are two other kinds of lice that infest people, but they do not live on the human head.

Head lice are very small, tan-colored insects (less than 1/8” long) that live on human heads. They lay their eggs (nits) on the hair. The eggs are tiny (about the size of the eye of a small needle) and gray or white in color.

CAUSES:	Pediculus humanus capitis, a louse
SYMPTOMS:	Itching of the scalp or neck. Look for: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Crawling lice in the hair, usually few in number 2. Eggs (nits) glued to the hair, often found behind the ears and at the base of the neck 3. Scratch marks on the scalp or back of the neck at hairline
SPREAD:	Lice are spread by direct person-to-person contact and by sharing personal items such as combs, brushes, hats, scarves, jackets, blankets, sheets, pillowcases, headphones, etc. Lice do not hop, jump or fly; they crawl and can fall off the head. Head lice do not live longer than 48 hours off the head. They only lay their eggs while on the head. Live eggs can be found anywhere on the hair. Also, the eggs do not hatch if they fall off. Lice do not spread to or from pets.
INCUBATION PERIOD:	Seven to 12 days from laying eggs to hatching.
CONTAGIOUS PERIOD:	Until properly treated with a lice-killing shampoos or rinses. As long as lice or eggs remain alive on the infested person or on fomites
EXCLUSION:	Until first treatment is completed and there are no live lice. Follow center’s nit policy.



PREVENTION/CONTROL:

1. Avoid sharing hair care items, towels, bedding, clothing, hats and headgear, such as headsets and sports helmets.
2. Hang clothing in individual lockers or on assigned coat hooks and spaced so they do not touch.
3. Hats should be tucked into sleeves.
4. All contaminated combs, brushes and similar items must be sanitized by one of the following:
 - a. Soaking in the medicated shampoo for 10 minutes
 - b. Soaking in a 2 percent Lysol* solution for one hour
 - c. Soaking in hot water for 10 minutes
5. Clean floors, furniture, mattresses, and carpeting by thorough vacuuming and dispose of vacuum bag. *The use of insecticide spray is not recommended.*
6. Machine wash and dry clothing, bed linens and other items that an infested person wore or used during the two days before treatment using the hot water (130°F) laundry cycle and the high heat drying cycle. Clothing and items that are not washable can be dry cleaned or sealed in a plastic bag and stored for two or more days.
7. Check your child's head frequently throughout the year. If one person in a family, child care, school, etc., has head lice, others should be checked, too. Only those who have head lice should be treated. Pretreatment will not prevent a child from getting lice.

TREATMENT:

1. Use a lice-killing shampoo, lotion or cream rinse obtained either over the counter at the drugstore or by prescription from your health care provider.
2. Follow the product's approved directions only as some treatments are toxic. Directions will vary, depending on the product used. If additional treatments are necessary, after following product directions, contact your health care provider. Do not exceed recommended product directions.
3. The nits are glued onto the hair shafts as they are laid, and they are difficult to remove. Although it can take time and sometimes be difficult, remove all nits to insure complete treatment.

Consult your pharmacist or health care provider before applying or using lice treatment pesticides when the person involved is pregnant, nursing, has allergies, asthma, epilepsy, pre-existing medical conditions, or has lice or nits in the eyebrows or eyelashes. Never use a pesticide near the eyes.

Prior to treating a child 2 years or younger, consult a health care provider.

For more information, please call the Northern Kentucky Health Department at 859.363.2070.

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** Lysol is a brand name. The Northern Kentucky Health Department does not endorse specific brand names.*

Lice (Head)

What are head lice?

Head lice are small parasitic insects found on the heads of people. Head lice (*pediculus capitis*) are very common in preschool and elementary-age children. Head lice derive nutrients by biting and eating blood several times each day and cannot survive for more than a day or so at room temperature without ready access to a blood meal.

Three forms of lice

- Nits: Head lice eggs that are attached to the hair shaft. They are difficult to see and are white or yellow. They can be mistaken for dandruff. Nits take about one week to hatch
- Nymph: The nymph is a baby louse and it is much smaller than an adult louse. The nymph state lasts about seven days
- Adult: The adult louse is tan to grayish-white and has six legs. It is the size of a sesame seed. An adult louse can live 30 days on a person's head

How you get head lice

- By physical contact with a person that has head lice (e.g., head-to-head, sharing hats, clothing, combs, brushes, or towels)
- By lying on a bed, couch, pillow, carpet or stuffed animal that has been used by an infested person
- Head lice do not jump from one person to another

Symptoms of head lice infestation

- Itching
- Tickling feeling of something moving in the hair
- Sores can develop from scratching the scalp
- The louse's saliva and feces may sensitize people to their bites, thereby exacerbating the irritation and increasing the chance of secondary infection from excessive scratching

How head lice infestation is diagnosed

- Observation of nits, nymphs or adult lice on the head of an individual
- If nits are observed 1/4 inch from scalp, the infestation is probably an old one and does not need treatment

How to treat head lice

- The drug of choice is permethrin 1% (e.g. Nix*)
- Pyrethrin (Rid*) is used if there appears to be a treatment failure with permethrin

How to prevent infestation of head lice

- Do not share hats, combs or brushes
- Avoid head-to-head contact with infected people
- Do not lie on a bed, couch, pillow, carpet or stuffed animal of an infested person



Clarification of head lice myths

- Head lice are not known to transmit infectious agents from person-to-person
- Shaving the head bald or cutting the hair short does not prevent head lice
- Hair soaps, bleaches and dyes do not eliminate head lice
- Pets do not give people head lice
- You cannot suffocate the head lice with oils or gels
- Heat from a hair dryer will not kill head lice
- Do not apply any application (e.g., mayonnaise, Vaseline*, olive oil, etc.) to the head to repel lice. It will not work
- Do not apply caustic agents (e.g., gasoline, kerosene, etc.) to the head to kill lice. They may be harmful to your health

More information

- Informational site designed for children: <http://headlice.org>
- Kentucky Department for Public Health Web page: <http://chfs.ky.gov/dph/Lice.htm>

** Nix, Rid and Vaseline are brand names. The Northern Kentucky Health Department does not endorse specific brand names.*