

Head Lice 101

What You Should Know About Head Lice

Lice Lessons



Overview

Head lice are a common community problem. An estimated 6 to 12 million infestations occur each year in the United States, most commonly among children ages 3 to 11 years old.¹ Though a head lice infestation is often spotted in school, it is usually acquired through direct head-to-head contact elsewhere, such as at sleepovers or camp.²

Head lice are not dangerous, and they do not transmit disease.¹ Additionally, despite what you might have heard, head lice often infest people with good hygiene and grooming habits.^{3,4} Your family, friends, or community may experience head lice. It's important to know some basics, including how to recognize symptoms and what to do if faced with an infestation.

Fast Facts

- An estimated 6 to 12 million infestations occur each year among US children 3 to 11 years of age¹
- Head lice do not discriminate, often infesting people with good hygiene.^{3,4} They spread mainly through head-to-head contact¹
- If you or your child exhibits signs of an infestation, it is important to talk to your doctor to learn about treatment options

What are head lice?

Head lice are tiny, wingless insects that live close to the human scalp. They feed on human blood.¹

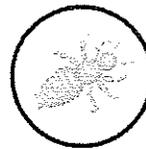
When checking for head lice, you may see several forms: the nit, the nymph, and the adult louse.



Nits are tiny, teardrop-shaped lice eggs that are often yellowish or white. Nits are also what you call the shells that are left behind once the eggs hatch. Nits are attached to the hair shaft and often found around the nape of the neck or the ears. Nits can look similar to dandruff, but cannot be easily removed or brushed off.¹



Nymphs, or baby lice, are small and grow to adult size in 1 to 2 weeks.¹



Adult lice are the size of a sesame seed and appear tan to grayish-white.¹

How are head lice spread?

- Head lice move by crawling and cannot jump or fly¹
- Head lice are mostly spread by direct head-to-head contact—for example, during play at home or school, sleepovers, sports activities, or camp¹
- It is possible, but not common, to spread head lice by contact with items that have been in contact with a person with head lice, such as clothing (for example, hats, scarves, or coats) or other personal items (such as combs, brushes, or towels)¹
- Head lice transmission can occur at home, in the community, or—very infrequently—in school^{1,2}

What are the signs and symptoms of infestation?

Signs and symptoms of infestation include¹:

- **Tickling** feeling on the scalp or in the hair
- **Itching** (caused by the bites of the louse)
- **Irritability and difficulty sleeping** (lice are more active in the dark)
- **Sores on the head** (caused by scratching, which can sometimes become infected)

Finding a live nymph or adult louse on the scalp or in the hair is an indication of an active infestation. They are most commonly found behind the ears and near the neckline at the back of the head.¹