

FAQ's

Should schools have a "No-Nit" Policy?

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), the Center for Disease Control (CDC), and the National Association of School Nurses (NASN) have attempted to clarify diagnosis and treatment of head lice and make recommendations for dealing with this condition in schools. Among their recommendations, they say no healthy child should be excluded from, or allowed to miss school because of head lice, and that "no nit" policies for return to school should be discouraged.

Although not painful or a serious health hazard, head lice are the cause of much embarrassment and misunderstanding, many unnecessary days lost from school and work, and millions of dollars spent on remedies. Numerous anecdotal reports exist of children missing weeks of school and even being forced to repeat a grade because of head lice.

Interestingly, the AAP reports in their 2010 Clinical Study of Head Lice "In 1 study, examination of carpets on 118 classroom floors found no lice despite more than 14,000 live lice found on the heads of 466 children using these classrooms. In a second study, live lice were found on only 4% of pillowcases used by infested volunteers. Thus, the major focus of control activities should be to reduce the number of lice on the head and to lessen the risks of head-to-head contact."

Parent/guardian education and intervention is the key to lice containment.

I have heard that head lice medications do not work, or that head lice are resistant to medication. Is this true?

A recent study done by Harvard University did show that SOME, but NOT ALL (or even most) head lice are resistant to common prescription and over-the-counter medications (OTC). There is no information on how widespread resistance may be in the United States. Resistance (medication not working) is more likely in people who have been treated many times for head lice. There are many reasons why medications may seem not to work. Below are some of those reasons:

1. **Misdiagnosis of a head lice infestation.** A person has head lice if they have crawling bugs on their head or many lice eggs (also called nits) within a quarter inch (approximately the width of your pinky finger) of the scalp. Nits found on the hair shaft further than 1/4 inch from the scalp have already hatched out or died. *Treatment is not recommended for people who only have nits further than one-quarter inch away from the scalp.*
2. **Not following treatment instructions fully.** See instructions below for how to treat a head lice infestation. Using medication alone is not likely to cure a head lice infestation.
3. **Medication not working at all (resistance).** If head lice medication does not kill any crawling bugs, then resistance is likely. If the medication kills some of the bugs, then resistance to medication is probably not the reason for treatment failure (see item #2 and #4).
4. **Medication kills crawling bugs, but is not able to penetrate the nits.** It is very difficult for head lice medication to penetrate the nit shell. Medication may effectively kill crawling bugs, but may not treat the nits. This is why follow-up treatment is recommended. See instructions below for a detailed summary.
5. **New infection.** You can get infested more than once with head lice. Teach family members how to prevent re-infection.

I can't afford the lice treatment.

Again, using the fine tooth combing method is very effective at ridding the hair of lice if done well. Stubborn infestations may require more than combing, though. The Missoula City/County Health Department is a resource for lice treatments. They can be reached at (406) 258-4770 or <http://www.co.missoula.mt.us/health/default.htm>.

I don't have time to treat my child and clean the house.

Concentrate on fine tooth combing of the hair and, if warranted, the use of a medicated treatment for effective treatment for lice.

My child has head lice. I don't. Should I treat myself to prevent being infested?

No, although anyone living with an infested person can get head lice. Have another person check the back and sides of your head for lice and nits. Check family members for lice and nits every 2-3 days. Remember: treatment with a medicated shampoo is only recommended if crawling lice or nits are found within a 1/4 inch of the scalp.

Is there a product I can use to prevent getting head lice?

None that are proven by research. There are many anecdotal reports found on the internet stating several essential oils may be helpful. Read side effects carefully if opting to use an alternative method.

Should my pets be treated for head lice?

No. Head lice do not live on pets.

My child is under 2 years old and has been diagnosed with head lice. Can I treat him or her with prescription or OTC drugs?

No. For children under 2 years old, remove crawling bugs and nits by hand. If the problem persists, consult your pediatrician.

Should household sprays be used to kill adult lice?

No. Spraying the house is NOT recommended. Fumigants and room sprays can be toxic if inhaled.

Should I have a pest control company spray my house?

No. Vacuuming floors and furniture is enough to treat the household.

Reference Sources:

<http://www.cdc.gov/parasites/lice/head/index.html>

<http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/early/2010/07/26/peds.2010-1308.abstract>

[National Association of School Nurses Position Paper on Lice](#)

<http://www.headlice.org/fag/treatments/alternatives.htm>

<https://identify.us.com/idmybug/head-lice/head-lice-documents/lice-mgmt-chart-home.pdf>