



Head Lice

CAUSE and DEFINITION:

Lice, although a nuisance, have not been associated with any disease process. Head lice can affect anyone in all the socioeconomic groups and do not represent poor hygiene. A positive diagnosis of head lice is made only when live lice are found.

CHARACTERISTICS:

Head lice are small, tan-colored insects (less than 1/8" long) that live on blood they draw from the scalp. The eggs (nits) are gray/white and about the size of the head of a pin. The lice and eggs are found on the hair. Lice can live only 1-2 days away from the scalp. Head lice crawl: they do not jump or fly. One sign of lice is an itching head.

INCUBATION / CONTAGION:

- Incubation: 6-10 days from laying to hatching of eggs. Lice can reproduce 2-3 weeks after hatching.
- Contagious period: until treated with a chemical that kills lice and viable eggs have been killed or removed. An adult female louse can lay up to 10 eggs a day. It takes only about 12 to 14 days for newly hatched eggs to reach adulthood.

MODE OF TRANSMISSION & CONTROL:

- They are spread from one person to another by direct contact with hair or head gear of people with lice; or by the sharing of items such as combs, hats, and other clothing. They are spread only by crawling lice (not nits).

HOME MANAGEMENT:

Parents are encouraged to check with your child's doctor before beginning any head lice treatment. The most effective way to treat head lice is with head lice medicine. After each treatment, using the comb-out method every 2 to 3 days for 2 to 3 weeks may help remove the nits and eggs. Your child's clothes, towels, hats, and bed linens will need to be washed in hot water and dry on high heat. Things that cannot be washed (stuffed animals, etc.) can be sealed in a plastic bag for two weeks or dry-cleaned.

The comb-out method can be used to help check for nits and head lice or to help remove nits and head lice after head lice treatment. However, the comb-out method usually doesn't work on its own to get rid of head lice.

Here is how you use the comb-out method:

- **Step 1:** Wet your child's hair.
- **Step 2:** Use a fine-tooth comb (louse or nit comb) and comb through your child's hair in small sections.
- **Step 3:** After each comb-through, wipe the comb on a wet paper towel. Examine the scalp, comb, and paper towel carefully.
- **Step 4:** Repeat steps 2 and 3 until you've combed through all of your child's hair.

RETURN TO SCHOOL:

- If LIVE lice are found at school, the student remains in school and parents are notified of the need for treatment.
- The student will need to go to the health office after treatment to be checked before returning to school. If no live lice are found, the student may return.