

Lice Aren't So Nice

Scratch scratch. Scratch. Your head is feeling really itchy. Could it be lice?

What are head lice?

Head lice are very small, less than 1/8-inch long, tan colored insects that live on the human head. They live and lay their eggs, called nits, close to the scalp. The nits are tiny and are gray, white, or brown. The nits are firmly cemented to the hair shaft. Although they don't hurt or make you sick, too much scratching can lead to scalp infections.

Lice Love Everyone

Anyone can get head lice. They are not a sign of being dirty and do not reflect poorly upon parents. Lice can set up house on **anyone's** head! Head lice are a common problem in children, between 6 and 12 million worldwide!

What are the symptoms of head lice?

Itching and scratching of the scalp and neck is usually the first sign that head lice are present. If lice or nits are found on the head of one person in a household, the heads of all household members should be checked. Look for crawling lice in the hair near the scalp and nits glued to the hair shafts. They are usually found within 1/2 inch of the scalp. Your School Nurse or Health Care Practitioner can help if you have questions recognizing nits or lice.

How are head lice spread?

Head lice are passed from person to person by direct contact, on shared personal items or by contact with infested bedding, furniture, or carpeting. Head lice do not fly or jump. They crawl and can fall off the head. Lice do not usually live longer than 48 hours off the head. They only lay their eggs while on the head. It is unlikely that the nits will hatch into insects after they have fallen off the head. Lice do not spread to pets, and you cannot get them from pets.

What is the treatment for head lice?

Lice control products come in the form of shampoos, creme rinses, and lotions. Some products are available over the counter from a drug store and some are only available by prescription. **Contact a physician before using any lice control product on an infant, or a woman who is pregnant or**

breast-feeding. Only those people with actual lice or nits should be treated, because use of these products will not prevent someone from getting head lice. Follow the directions carefully. The directions are not the same for every product. The lice don't always die immediately. It might take up to 24 hours. If live lice are seen two days after treatment, call your Health Care Provider for advice. Silsbee Independent School District requires that all nits be removed as part of the treatment. A special fine-toothed comb is usually included with the product, or can be purchased separately. However, many people feel that the most effective way to remove nits is with fingernails. Be sure to clean your fingernails thoroughly with hot soapy water and scrape under them if you used them to remove nits. After the hair is dry, recheck the head for any nits left over and remove them. After treatment, check the head every day for several days.

How can the spread of head lice be controlled?

Combs, brushes, and similar items should be soaked for at least 30 minutes in hot soapy water. Recently worn clothing, including hats, scarves, jackets, pajamas, etc., should be washed in hot water and dried in a hot drier for at least 20 minutes before being worn again. Clean floors and thoroughly vacuum carpets, furniture, mattresses and the seats of cars.

How can the spread of head lice be prevented?

Check children's heads frequently throughout the year.

Teach children:

- To avoid sharing items for hair care, clothing, hats, towels, and bedding.
- When spending the night away from home, have children bring their own sleeping bag and pillow.
- To avoid putting their heads together.

Treatment the Texas Department of State Health Services **does not** recommend:

Spraying/Bombing

Fumigation for head lice is of little or no value, and increases the potential for needless exposure to toxic chemicals.

Toxic/Flammable Chemicals

Home remedies such as flea shampoo, alcohol, kerosene, and gasoline should never be used. These are extremely dangerous and are not proven effective against head lice.