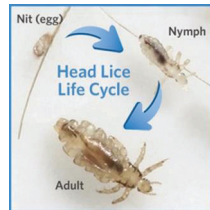


Head Lice: What You Need to Know

What are Head Lice?

Lice are tiny wingless insects that live among human hairs and feed on tiny amounts of blood from biting the scalp. Lice live on the scalp and lay eggs (nits). The nits, which are small, white or brown and oval shaped are found close to the scalp and firmly attach to the hair shaft. They are most often found at the nape of the neck and around the ears. Nits may look like dandruff but where dandruff shakes loose, the nits will not. Nits farther away than one quarter to one half inch on the hair shaft are dead egg casings and pose no risk to others.



What Causes Head Lice?

The most common way to get head lice is head to head contact. Lice cannot fly or jump, although it may seem like lice can jump because they are tiny and move quickly. Head lice crawl from head to head contact and onto objects that come into contact with human hair. This makes it possible to get head lice by sharing everyday objects infested with head lice such as hats, scarves, coats, hair accessories, brushes, combs and towels.

How Do I Know if a Child Has Head Lice?

Lice bites cause itching and scratching. The most common symptom of lice infestation is severe itching of the scalp especially at the nape of the neck and above the ears. You may see lice crawling through the hair and nits (eggs) firmly attached to the hair shaft. A student may also develop small red bumps or sores from scratching.

Anyone Can Get Head Lice!

Lice affect people in all socioeconomic classes. Having head lice is **NOT** a sign of dirtiness or poor hygiene. An estimated that 6 to 12 million people a year get head lice, and most of them are ages 3 to 11.

Important Things to Remember:

- Lice are considered a nuisance, not a communicable disease.
- Transmission of lice occurs mainly through head to head contact.
- Lice don't jump or hop or fly. They crawl.
- Head lice rarely transfer between children in classrooms. Much more common are transfers between family members, overnight guests, and playmates that spent a large amount of time together.
- Nits cannot be transferred from head to head. Nits are stuck like glue to the hair shaft.
- Nits can only hatch when warmed by body heat when near the scalp. Therefore, nits found more than one inch from the scalp will not become live lice – and may in fact be dead egg shells.
- Control measures such as mass (classroom checks) screenings for nits are not productive, cost-effective, or merited. Classroom checks waste education time and violate student privacy. School Health staff only screen students who display symptoms of lice (itching) in a confidential setting.
- Lice are much harder to get than a cold, flu, ear infection, pink eye, strep throat, food poisoning, or impetigo.
- Classroom notification letters violate privacy laws and cause unnecessary public alarm.
- Simple classroom and school-wide cleaning is all that is necessary (regular vacuuming of carpet). Research has shown that lice survive less than one day when not on the head.

Head Lice: What You Need to Know (continued)

How to Check for Head Lice

(Check out this YouTube video:

<https://youtu.be/lxA59erWM5w>)

1. All household members should be checked by another person for lice and/or nits (eggs).
2. Use a magnifying glass in bright light to help you see the lice and nits (eggs).
3. Use a tool, such as a comb or two unsharpened pencils, to lift and part the hair.
4. Look for nits near the scalp, beginning at the back of the neck and behind the ears.
5. Examine small sections of hair (1-2 inches wide) one at a time.
6. Unlike dandruff, nits stick to the hair. Dandruff should move when lightly touched.
7. If either lice or nits (eggs) are found, begin treatment.

8. Vacuum floors, fabric-covered furniture and car seats.
9. Consider checking your family members for lice and make sure anyone with symptoms is also getting treated.

School health staff will provide evidence-based treatment options for families, and help them understand how to use it.

Think Prevention

- Vacuum carpeted areas frequently.
- Discourage body contact and sharing of personal items between children.
- Don't share classroom items such as costumes, pillows and blankets.



Akron
Children's
Hospital

Reference:

American Academy of Dermatology: www.aad.org/public/diseases/contagious-skin-diseases/head-lice#causes

Bowden, V. R. (2012). Losing the louse: How to manage this common infestation in children. *Pediatric nursing*, 38(5), 253-255.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2015). Head Lice Information for Schools. Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/parasites/lice/head/schools.html>

Devore CD, Schutze GE; AAP, Council on School Health, Committee on Infectious Dises. Head Lice. *Pediatrics*. 2015;135(5):e1355–e1365 - October 01, 2015AAP

Kid's Health: <https://kidshealth.org/en/parents/head-lice-sheet.html>

National Association of School Nurses. (2016). Head Lice Management in the School Setting (Position Statement). Silver Spring, MD: Author.