

Lice Mythbuster

Myths	Facts
Lice are easy to get.	Lice are spread by head-to-head contact. They are much harder to get than a cold, flu, ear infection, pink eye, or strep throat.
Avoiding lice is important as they spread disease.	Lice do not spread any known disease. They are annoying and “icky” but cause no disease.
School is a common place for lice transmission.	School is a rare source of transmission. Much more common are family members, overnight guests, and playmates who spend a large amount of time together.
Lice can jump or fly from one person to another.	Lice can only crawl. They cannot jump nor fly. DIRECT head-to-head contact is how they get from one person to another. Sitting next to someone with lice does not increase the risk of getting lice.
Poor hygiene contributes to lice.	Hygiene makes absolutely no difference. Lice actually like clean hair more than dirty. You get lice by close personal contact with someone else who has lice, not by being dirty.
Lice live a long time.	Lice live only 1 to 2 days off the head.
Nits (eggs) can fall from hair and cause lice in another person.	Nits are cemented to the hair and very hard to remove. They cannot fall off. Newly hatched larvae must find a head quickly or they will die.
Any nits (eggs) left in the hair can cause lice to come back.	Any nits farther than one quarter to one half an inch from the scalp on the hair shaft are ALREADY HATCHED and pose no risk to others.
Lice are often spread via hats or helmets.	Rare, but possible. It is much more common for transmission to occur from pillows, sheets, or hairbrushes.
Checking a classroom when one student has lice can prevent lice from spreading.	Classroom transmission is rare. Checking whole classrooms is a disruption of valuable teaching time. Checking family members and close playmates is much more appropriate.
“No-nit” policies reduce the risk of head lice in schools.	Research shows “no-nit” policies do not decrease the number of cases of head lice. They do increase student absences and the negative social stigma associated with head lice.

Adapted from:

Hats Off to Success: Changing Head Lice Policy, Deborah Pontius, 2011

Head Lice: A Lousy Problem, North Dakota Department of Health, 2012