

The Facts of Lice

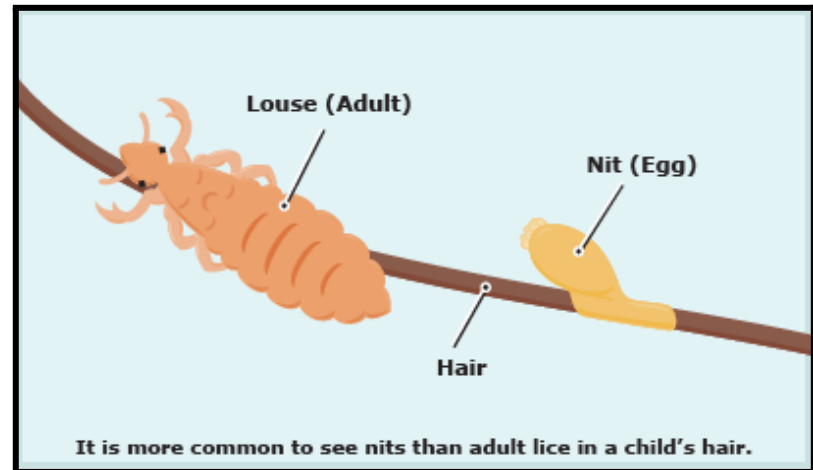
What You Should Know About Head Lice



Overview

Head lice are a common community problem. Estimates range from 6 to 12 million cases each year in the U.S. Head lice most commonly affect children ages 3 to 11 and those who live with them.

Head lice are not a health risk but there is a lot of misinformation associated with them! Many people mistakenly think head lice are an indication of poor hygiene, and unclean living conditions **NOT** true! Head lice **do not** hop, jump, or fly! They can transfer from one head to another by moderately prolonged head-to-head contact. Your family, friends, and community may deal with head lice at one time or another. It's important to know the facts about head lice and what steps to take!



What are Head Lice?

Head lice are tiny, wingless insects that live close to the human scalp. Head lice do not infest places or things! They will not survive long off a human head - they depend on us for food, shelter, and love! An adult louse is about the length of a sesame seed, the nits (eggs) and babies are even smaller! The nits are tiny, teardrop shaped eggs that are glued to one side of the hair shaft. Nits are easily confused with dandruff and other debris found in children's hair. You will not be able to brush a nit away.

How are Head Lice Spread?

- Head lice move by crawling. Remember - they **cannot** hop, jump, or fly!
- Head lice are most often spread by direct head-to-head (hair-to-hair) contact -for example during slumber parties and play at home, school, or community areas.
- It is not very likely that head lice are spread by things such as hats, coats, scarves, brushes, or combs but it is reasonable to teach your child not to share these items with others.
- Head lice transmission can occur at home, school, or in the community.

How Will I Know If My Child Has Head Lice?

Finding a live (crawling) louse on the scalp or in the hair is an indication of an active infestation. Many people never experience symptoms (like itching or a tickling sensation) so the best way to catch it early is to make checking your child's head a regular part of your family's personal hygiene routine like brushing teeth or taking a bath. **ONCE A WEEK, TAKE A PEEK!**

How Do I Check For Head Lice?

- Make this a normal part of your personal hygiene routine - **ONCE A WEEK, TAKE A PEEK!**
- Good lighting is important ~ natural light by a window or sitting directly under a good light.
- Start at one side of the head and part the hair in very small sections. Carefully look at the hair close to the scalp. Continue this section-by-section covering the entire scalp.
- Look for tiny teardrop shaped eggs, tan to whitish in color, attached to the hair shaft. Lice crawl quickly away from the light so you are likely to spot the nits first.
- Wet combing with a fine-tooth nit comb has been found to be more accurate in identifying head lice infestation early and can also be part of treatment if head lice are found.

What If I Find Head Lice Or Nits?

- Take a deep breath and try not to worry. Head lice are a normal part of life. Anyone can get them and it is nothing to be ashamed of or embarrassed about.
- If you spot head lice take a close look at everyone in the household, including adults!
- Anyone in the household with head lice should be treated at the same time.
- You may treat with an over-the-counter product or talk to a doctor about prescription products that may be right for you. **Follow the directions exactly!**
- Lice removal services are available in the area for a cost. Keep in mind these businesses are not regulated by any industry and “natural products” are not regulated by the FDA.
- There is no scientific evidence that home remedies are effective treatments.
- Tell your family, friends, and close contacts you have found head lice so they can check as well! Tell your school nurse and talk to her about treatment options and guidance.
- Only treat if live (crawling) lice are found!
- Extreme cleaning measures are not helpful - remember, head lice infest *people*, **not** places or things. It is reasonable to wash family bed linens, clothes, hats, towels that have come into contact with the person with head lice in the last 24-48 hours in very hot water (130°).
- Personal items (combs, brushes, hair clips) that were exposed to the persons with an active head lice infestation can be soaked in hot water (130°) or simply thrown away.

Stop the Spread ~ Spread the Word!

The following are reliable sources of evidence-based factual information which support the above recommendations:

American
Academy of
Pediatrics

