

## Treatment Recommendations: Head lice

When treating head lice, extra measures can be combined with recommended medicine:

**Supplemental Measures:** Head lice do not survive long if they fall off a person and cannot feed. You don't need to spend a lot of time or money on housecleaning activities. Follow these steps to help avoid re-infestation by lice that have recently fallen off the hair or crawled onto clothing or furniture.

1. Machine wash and dry clothing, bed linens, and other items that the infested person wore or used during the 2 days before treatment using the hot water (130°F) laundry cycle and the high heat drying cycle. Clothing and items that are not washable can be dry-cleaned OR sealed in a plastic bag and stored for 2 weeks.
  - For example, hats, scarves, pillow cases, bedding, clothing, and towels worn or used in the 2-day period just before treatment is started can be machine washed and dried using the hot water and hot air cycles because lice and eggs are killed by exposure for 5 minutes to temperatures greater than 53.5°C (128.3°F).
  - Soak combs and brushes in hot water (at least 130°F) for 5–10 minutes.
2. Vacuum the floor and furniture, particularly where the infested person sat or lay. Head lice survive less than 1–2 days if they fall off a person and cannot feed. Spending much time and money on house cleaning activities is not necessary to avoid reinfestation by lice or nits that may have fallen off the head or crawled onto furniture or clothing.
3. Do not use fumigant sprays; they can be toxic if inhaled or absorbed through the skin.

### **When treating head lice**

1. Do not use extra amounts of any lice medication unless instructed to do so by your physician and pharmacist. The drugs used to treat lice are insecticides and can be dangerous if they are misused or overused.
2. All the medications listed above should be kept out of the eyes. If they get onto the eyes, they should be immediately flushed away.
3. Do not treat an infested person more than 2–3 times with the same medication if it does not seem to be working. This may be caused by using

the medicine incorrectly or by resistance to the medicine. Always seek the advice of your health care provider if this should happen. He/she may recommend an alternative medication.

4. Do not use different head lice drugs at the same time unless instructed to do so by your physician and pharmacist.
5. The [AAP recommends](#) rinsing all topical pediculicides from the hair over a sink, rather than in the shower or bath to limit skin exposure, and to use warm water rather than hot water to minimize absorption.

### **Over-the-counter Medications**

Many head lice medications are available “Over-the-counter” without a prescription at a local drug store or pharmacy. Each Over-the-counter product approved by the FDA for the treatment of head lice contains one of the following active ingredients. Always follow the label instructions when administering these medications. If crawling lice are still seen after a full course of treatment contact your health care provider.

#### **1. Pyrethrins combined with piperonyl butoxide;**

Brand name products:

A-200\*, Pronto\*, R&C\*, Rid\*, Triple X\*.

Pyrethrins can only kill live lice, not unhatched eggs (nits). A second treatment is recommended 9 to 10 days after the first treatment to kill any newly hatched lice before they can produce new eggs. Pyrethrin is approved for use on children 2 years of age and older. Resistance has been reported. If crawling lice are still seen after a full course of treatment contact your health care provider.

#### **2. Permethrin lotion, 1%;**

Brand name product:

Nix\*. Permethrin is safe and effective when used as directed. Permethrin kills live lice but not unhatched eggs. Permethrin may continue to kill newly hatched lice for several days after treatment. A second treatment often is necessary on day 9 to kill any newly hatched lice before they can produce new eggs. Permethrin is approved for use on children 2 months of age and older. Resistance to 1% permethrin has been reported, but its prevalence is unknown. If crawling lice are still seen after a full course of treatment contact your health care provider.

### **Prescription Medications**

The following medications, in alphabetical order, approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for the treatment of head lice are available only by prescription. Always follow the instructions of your health care provider when

administering these medications. If crawling lice are still seen after a full course of treatment, contact your health care provider.

- **Benzyl alcohol lotion, 5%;**

Brand name product: Ulesfia lotion

\*Benzyl alcohol is an aromatic alcohol. Benzyl alcohol lotion, 5% has been approved by the FDA for the treatment of head lice and is considered safe and effective when used as directed. It kills lice but it is not ovicidal. A second treatment is needed 7 days after the first treatment to kill any newly hatched lice before they can produce new eggs. Benzyl alcohol lotion is intended for use on persons who are 6 months of age and older and its safety in persons aged more 60 years has not been established. It can be irritating to the skin.

- **Ivermectin lotion, 0.5%;**

Brand name product: Sklice

\*Ivermectin lotion, 0.5% was approved by the FDA in 2012 for treatment of head lice in persons 6 months of age and older. It is not ovicidal, but appears to prevent nymphs (newly hatched lice) from surviving. It is effective in most patients when given as a single application on dry hair without nit combing. It should not be used for retreatment without talking to a healthcare provider. Given as a tablet in mass drug administrations, oral ivermectin has been used extensively and safely for over two decades in many countries to treat filarial worm infections. Although not FDA-approved for the treatment of lice, ivermectin tablets given in a single oral dose of 200 micrograms/kg or 400 micrograms/kg repeated in 9-10 days has been shown effective against head lice. It should not be used in children weighing less than 15 kg or in pregnant women.

- **Malathion lotion, 0.5%;**

Brand name product: Ovide

\*Malathion is an organophosphate. The formulation of malathion approved in the United States for the treatment of head lice is a lotion that is safe and effective when used as directed. Malathion is pediculicidal (kills live lice) and partially ovicidal (kills some lice eggs). A second treatment is recommended if live lice still are present 7–9 days after treatment. Malathion is intended for use on persons 6 years of age and older. Malathion can be irritating to the skin. Malathion lotion is flammable; do not smoke or use electrical heat sources, including hair dryers, curlers, and curling or flat irons, when applying malathion lotion and while the hair is

wet.

More on: [Malathion](#)

- **Spinosad 0.9% topical suspension;**

Brand name product: Natroba

\*Spinosad is derived from soil bacteria. Spinosad topical suspension, 0.9%, was approved by the FDA in 2011. Since it kills live lice as well as unhatched eggs, retreatment is usually not needed. Nit combing is not required. Spinosad topical suspension is approved for the treatment of children 6 months of age and older. It is safe and effective when used as directed. Repeat treatment should be given only if live (crawling) lice are seen 7 days after the first treatment.

*\*Use of trade names is for identification purposes only and does not imply endorsement by the Public Health Service or by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.*

\* Information taken from: <https://www.cdc.gov/parasites/lice/head/treatment.html>