

Transmission of Head Lice

Head lice are transmitted by:

- Person-to-person transmission (direct contact) – The majority of transmissions of head lice occur by direct head-to-head contact with an infested person. Most of the time this is a close friend or relative.
- Vector transmission (indirect contact) – This type of transmission may occur through the sharing of bedding, or by using personal items such as combs, brushes, scarves, hair ornaments, or hats of an infested person. Although transmission via indirect contact is possible, it is rare.



Common ways of transmission through head-to-head contact include:

- Slumber parties
- Shared beds
- Sport activities
- Reading circles

Without head-to-head contact, these ways of transmission are highly unlikely:

- School buses
- Hats, helmets, or headphones
- Gym mats
- Sitting at a desk

Anyone can get head lice, but some people are at greater risk than others. Those people include:

- Children between the ages of 3 and 11 years
- Girls are more likely to get head lice than boys, possibly because of their play styles and sharing of personal items.⁵
- People with long or short hair can contract head lice. Although all races can get head lice, studies show that children of African-American descent are less likely to become infested.⁵



Quick Facts

1. Head lice are adept at moving from hair-to-hair because of their specialized “claws.” They **cannot jump, fly, or crawl great distances over hard surfaces.**
2. Head lice **cannot survive long away from a human head.** A nymph or adult louse that falls from its host will perish within a couple days under the most optimal conditions. Louse eggs do not hatch at normal room temperatures; they require the higher temperatures associated with a human body.

⁵ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Head Lice Epidemiology: <http://www.cdc.gov/parasites/lice/head/epi.html>.