

HEAD LICE: PREVENTION AND TREATMENT

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Prevention

- Ask your child to avoid head to head contact with classmates during play and other activities (including “selfies”).
- Encourage your child to never share items such as pillows, towels, coats, hats, brushes or hair accessories.
- Keep children in separate beds on sleepovers. Change the sheets when a different person will be using them.
- Keep long hair tied back in pony-tails or braids- especially if other children in the class have lice.

Head Lice Prevention Products

There is minimal evidence supporting natural plant oils such as rosemary, menthol, tea tree, eucalyptus, citronella and lemon grass to repel lice. Little information exists as to the safety and toxicity of these products. Anecdotally, families have had success using different techniques to try to prevent their child from coming home with lice. There are numerous commercially available shampoos containing tea tree oil, menthol, rosemary and other items. Parents may also opt to add tea tree oil to their own shampoo or detangler spray. If you choose to try one of these options, please watch your child for scalp irritation or adverse reactions and discontinue use.

How to check for lice and nits

Got that letter home from school indicating someone in your child’s class has pediculosis (head lice)? There are numerous videos online to help you learn how to check your child’s head for lice. Here is one example: <https://youtu.be/Hybe7quFRVU>

Cleaning

Lice can live no longer than 24 hours off a human head and nits are unlikely to hatch at room temperature. Major house cleaning is not necessary!! At most, washing items in close or prolonged contact with the head (eg, hats, pillowcases, brushes and combs) may be warranted. Wash such items in hot water and dry them in a hot dryer for 15 minutes. Storing any item in a sealed plastic bag for two weeks will kill both live lice and nits. Using chemical sprays and vacuuming is unnecessary. Lice cannot live on pets, so don’t worry about Fido spreading anything!!

Treatment Options

Treatment is only required if live lice are found. It is recommended that all household members are inspected and treated if infested.

All agents require regular nit-combing between treatments for best outcomes. Follow package instructions very closely and re-treat after 7-10 days to ensure no newly hatched lice survive. All products are available from a pharmacist without a prescription. Some drug plans may pay for lice treatments in which case a prescription would be required.

Insecticide Treatments (Nix, Kwellada-P, R&C) (approx. \$15-\$20)

These agents have very poor absorption into the skin and have favorable safety profiles. Do not rinse off in bath tub, to minimize exposure elsewhere on the body.

- Are neurotoxic to lice
- Kill live lice but not eggs (nits)
- Not to be used in anyone with chrysanthemum or ragweed allergy
- Resistance to these agents is growing, meaning they may be less effective
- May cause temporary itching or burning of scalp

Non-Insecticide Treatments

These agents act physically against lice (rather than chemically).

Resultz (\$22-\$28)

- Dissolves the wax covering on the exoskeleton of head lice causing dehydration and subsequent death
- Kills live lice but not eggs (nits)
- Not to be used in children younger than 4 years of age
- Resistance is unlikely due to its physical mode of action
- May cause mild irritation or scalp itch
- Treatment takes only 10-15 minutes

NYDA (\$36-\$40)

- Penetrates into the insect's breathing apparatus causing suffocation
- Effectively kills lice, nymphs and eggs (nits)
- Not to be used on children younger than 2 years of age
- Resistance unlikely due to physical mode of action
- Rarely causes mild scalp irritation
- Treatment requires 30min application, remains on overnight and is washed off in morning

Wet-Combing (\$)

- Apply conditioner to hair and use quality lice-comb over entire scalp every 3 days for 2-3 weeks
- One quality lice comb can be washed and reused
- Chemical free
- Requires patience and persistence
- 38% efficacy rate in one small study. Adding white vinegar showed no additional benefit.

Other Products

A number of household products such as mayonnaise, petroleum jelly, olive oil, margarine and thick hair gel have been suggested as treatments for head lice. Applying a thick coating of such agents to the hair and scalp and leaving on overnight theoretically suffocates lice. However, these products are not very effective at killing lice compared with topical insecticides and physical agents. Using flammable, toxic and dangerous substances like gasoline or kerosene to treat head lice is not recommended under any circumstances.

Lice Removal Companies (Lice Squad, others) (\$\$\$\$)

Travel to their clinics or they will come to your home to remove lice in a safe, effective manner. Many families are holding "Lice Parties" to help when having to treat numerous people. Expensive but easy!



HEAD LICE FACT SHEET



What are head lice?

The head louse is an insect that lives and breeds on your head. Head lice feed themselves by biting your scalp. Having head lice (pediculosis) is common; as many as 6 – 12 million people worldwide get head lice each year.

Who can get head lice?

Anyone who comes in close head-to-head contact with someone who already has head lice can get head lice. Head lice are found more often among children between the ages of 3 – 10, and their families.

How do I know if I have head lice?

- Tickling feeling of something moving in the hair.
- Itching, caused by an allergic reaction to the bites.
- Irritability.
- Sores on the head caused by scratching. These sores can sometimes become infected.

How do you get head lice?

- By close head-to-head contact with someone who already has head lice. Contact is common during play at school and at home (slumber parties, sports activities, at camp, on a playground, etc.).
- By using hats, scarves, combs, brushes, hair ribbons, pillows or towels recently used by someone with head lice.

What do they look like?

The insects are tiny, wingless, move quickly, and are difficult to see. They cannot jump or fly. They are 1 – 2 mm long and greyish brown in colour. There are three forms of lice: the nit, the nymph and the adult.

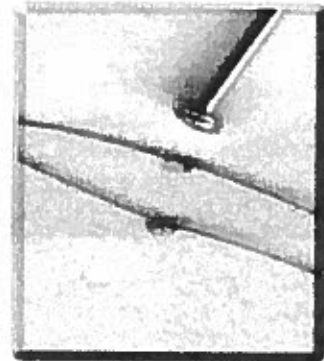
Nits: Nits are head lice eggs. They are hard to see and are often confused with dandruff or hair spray droplets. Nits are found firmly attached to the hair shaft. They are oval and usually yellow to white. Nits take about one week to hatch.

Nymph: The nit hatches into a baby louse called a nymph. It looks like an adult head louse, but is smaller. Nymphs mature into adults about seven days after hatching. To live, the nymph must feed on blood.

Adults: The adult louse is about the size of a sesame seed, has six legs, and is tan to greyish-white. Females lay nits; they are usually larger than males. Adult lice can live up to 30 days on a person's head. To live, adult lice need to feed on blood. If a louse falls off a person, it dies within two days.

How are head lice treated?

- There are many products available to treat head lice.
- Before buying any product, talk to your pharmacist.
- Talk to your doctor before treating:
 - children under two years;
 - a person with a seizure disorder;
 - a person with a scalp infection.



Attached nits enlarged



LICE (magnified)

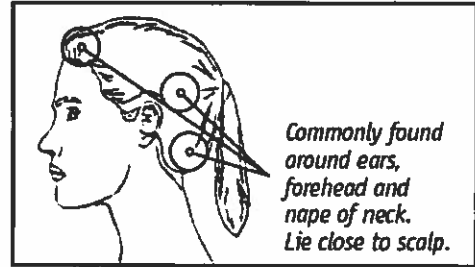
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HEAD LICE FACT SHEET



- Buy a head lice shampoo or cream rinse from your drug store.
- Apply the product following instructions carefully. Misuse and overuse could be hazardous.
- Head lice products kill the head lice and many eggs, but one treatment may not kill all the eggs.
- Therefore, apply a second treatment 7 – 10 days after the first treatment to kill any newly hatched lice before they mature.
- It is suggested that you limit shampoo use between the two treatments and in the week following the second treatment. This may allow the head lice product to work more effectively.
- Check the head for live lice daily between treatments and remove any nits that are still present. Use a bright light to help you see. Carefully check all sections of the head and remove all the nits by using fingernails or a nit comb to drag each nit down the hair shaft.
- If live lice are found in the days following the first treatment, consult your pharmacist or the phone number at the bottom of this sheet.
- There is conflicting information concerning whether or not all nits should be removed after the application of head lice products. Toronto Public Health recommends the removal of all nits as head lice products are not 100% effective. Removal of nits may minimize the hatching of eggs that were not killed and the spread of young hatched lice to other heads. It is also easier to notice a new infestation if all nits are removed.



What if a baby or a woman who is pregnant or breastfeeding has head lice?

Call your family doctor or The Motherisk Program at The Hospital for Sick Children at 416-813-6780 for advice before choosing a treatment product. If pregnant and treating others, wear plastic or rubber gloves.

Do I need to clean my house?

You must wash hats, scarves, hairbrushes, combs, or any other item that is worn or used on the head, as well as pillowcases, towels and bed linens after the first and second treatment in very hot soapy water. Items that cannot be machine-washed should be dry cleaned or placed in an airtight bag for 10 days to two weeks. Excessive house cleaning is not necessary, but it may be advisable to vacuum surfaces where heads have rested (e.g. sofas, seats of cars and helmets). NEVER use insecticide sprays.

How can I control the spread of head lice?

- Discourage head-to-head contact and sharing of hats, scarves, hairbrushes and combs.
- Tie long hair back in braids.
- Check the heads of all family members and people in close contact in case someone else has head lice.
- All family members with head lice should be treated at the same time.
- Tell all close contacts of the person with head lice to check their head. As well, tell the child's teacher and/or daycare worker.
- You cannot prevent head lice by using head lice shampoos or products – use them only if you have head lice.
- Check young school age children weekly for head lice; more often if there is an outbreak.

Important points to remember

1. Be sensitive to your child's feelings!
2. Lack of cleanliness does not cause head lice.
3. Both children and adults can get head lice.
4. Short hair does not prevent the spread of lice.
5. Head lice do not live on dogs, cats or other animals.

For more information call the Toronto Health Connection at 416-338-7600

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