

# Lice Treatment Guide For Parents

## What are Head Lice?

Head lice are parasitic insects that feed on human blood several times a day and live close to the human scalp. They are a common nuisance among school age children and can affect anyone regardless of family incomes, social status or level of personal hygiene or cleanliness. They do not transmit disease and are not a serious medical condition.

## How did my child get head lice?

Head lice move by crawling. They cannot hop or fly and do not live on pets. Head lice are spread primarily by direct contact with the hair of an infected person. Head-to-head contact is the most common way to get head lice. Head-to-head contact is common during play at school, at home, and elsewhere (sports activities, playground, slumber parties, and camp). A person can also get head lice after sharing clothing or belongings recently worn or used by an infected person (clothes, brushes, combs, helmets, stuffed animals, etc.).

Pets are neither carriers nor hosts of human lice.

## What do head lice look like?

An adult head louse is about the size of a sesame seed, has six legs and is tan to grayish white in color. They move quickly, especially when exposed to light. They prefer living on the scalp, at the nape of the neck and behind the ears where it is warmer. This is also where you may find nits (lice eggs). Nits are attached to the hair shaft by a sticky substance that cannot be shaken off or flicked away. The nits are easy to identify. They have a teardrop shape and are usually found within ¼ inch of the scalp in an active case.

## Home Treatment

1. According to current recommendations by the Center for Disease Control and the American Academy of Pediatrics, head lice should be treated with a medicated lice killing shampoo. Read all instructions on the package insert carefully before starting the treatment. All household members should be checked for lice and treated if necessary (treat at same time). Many of these shampoos are insecticides and should be used with caution in very young children and pregnant or nursing women. In these cases, consult your health care provider before lice treatment. See <http://www.cdc.gov/parasites/lice/head/treatment.html>

Here are some other helpful tips:

- If the infested person has very long hair (longer than shoulder length) a second bottle may be necessary.
  - Do not use a crème rinse, combination shampoo/conditioner, or condition before using the lice killing shampoo.
  - Do not re-wash hair for 1-2 days after the lice shampoo is removed. Follow manufacturer's directions carefully.
  - Have the infested person put on clean clothing after the treatment.
  - No lice shampoo kills all nits, so manual removal is critical to prevent re-infestation. Nits are cemented firmly to the hair shaft and adult lice hold tightly to hair with hook-like claws. Be sure to use the fine-toothed comb included in the package.
  - Checking and combing the hair with the nit comb every 2-3 days after the treatment to remove nits and lice, may decrease the chance of self-re-infestation. Continue to check for 2-3 weeks to be sure all lice and nits are gone.
  - Keep long hair pulled back or braided to reduce transmission and re-infestation through head to head contact.
  - Using a mild vinegar rinse diluted with water may aid in the removal of nits. Do not use if the manufacturer has recommended against using other products on the hair.
2. Machine wash and dry all clothing, coats, hats, bed linens, towels, and other items that the infested person used during the 2 days before treatment, using the hot water 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 for 2 weeks. It is not necessary to discard these items.
  3. Vacuum the floor, furniture, and car seats, particularly where the infested person sat or lay. Head lice survive less than 1-2 days off the human head.
  4. Soak brushes and combs in hot water (at least 130 degrees F.) for 5-10 minutes.
  5. Retreatment is recommended 7-10 days (preferably day 9 according to the CDC) after the first shampoo (or according to product instructions) in order to kill any surviving hatched lice before they produce new eggs.