

HEAD LICE FACT SHEET

What are head lice?

Head lice are small insects that live on the hair, eyebrows, and eyelashes of humans where they feed on blood and lay eggs (*nits*) on hair shafts. Nits hatch after 7-10 days. Adult lice survive for 24-36 hours without a human host and blood for food.



Who can get head lice?

ANYONE! However, it is more common in school-age children. You can contract head lice by coming in direct contact with an infested person's head or with personal belongings such as combs, brushes, towels, barrettes, hats, headphones, etc. Head lice can spread as long as lice or eggs remain alive on the infested person or clothing. Dogs and cats do not catch head lice.

How to know if you have lice - Itching of the head and neck is common with head lice. It may be mild to intense or you may not itch at all. Rarely, irritated skin from head lice and constant scratching can cause an infection. Signs of such bacterial infection include fever, swollen neck lymph nodes, and hot, reddened scalp skin. Lice like warmth and avoid light so they are most commonly found at the nape of the neck and behind the ears.

If you find lice or nits on your child, do not panic, just follow the steps outlined below to eliminate the problem.

1. Check your child and every member of the family

- Inspect your child's head regularly for head lice. It's especially important after vacation, so that lice can be detected and treated early before they have a chance to spread in school.
- Look for small nits, ranging in color from yellow to silvery grey, "glued" to the hair shaft similar in appearance to dandruff, but not easily removed. Where nits have hatched, live lice may be seen. Lice are small, wingless, grayish-tan insects.

2. Use an effective head lice treatment

- If nits or lice are found, your child should be treated with a medicated shampoo. Permethrin-based medications such as **NIX** and **RID** are available for purchase over-the-counter. Follow package directions closely. Pesticide-free alternatives are available under the names LiceMD and NIX Ultra, which are available at CVS, Harris Teeter, etc.
- A second round of treatment must be conducted after 9-10 days regardless of the product. This timeframe corresponds with the lifecycle of the nits.
- Please note that cream rinses and conditioners can decrease the effectiveness of lice shampoos.

3. Remove all nits

- **Remove nits** by gently combing the child's hair with a nit removal comb. This is most easily done when the hair is wet. The remaining nits (those not removed by the comb) must be removed manually.
- This procedure must be followed daily until the second treatment.
- Since children with nits are not allowed in school, there are professional alternatives that will kill the nits with heat at Lice Clinics of America.

4. A household infected with lice should be treated

- Vacuum floors, rugs, pillows, mattresses, upholstered furniture, and even car seats.
- Wash hats, scarves, clothing, towels, and bed linen in hot water (130°F) and dry using high heat for at least 20 minutes. If the material cannot be washed or dried at high temperatures it is acceptable to place those textiles in an airtight plastic bag for two weeks.
- Combs & brushes should be washed with medicated shampoo or soaked in hot water at 130°F for at least 10 minutes.

5. How to prevent infestations

- Avoid direct contact with an infested person's hair and don't share combs, brushes, hats, scarves, ribbons, or any other personal items.
- Keep long hair pulled back or braided.
- There is no complete protection from head lice, however some studies have shown that head lice do not like the smell of tea tree, lavender, and peppermint oil.

6. Professional Help

Head lice are very common and the treatment and removal is very labor and work intensive. For this reason there are professional lice and nit removers in Montgomery County, which usually use a pesticide-free approach.

- Potomac Lice Lady, www.potomalicelady.com
- Lice Clinics of America, www.liceclinicsofamerica.com
- Lice Happens, www.licehappens.com