

HEAD LICE 411

WHAT IS HEAD LICE?

Head lice is a scalp infection with tiny grayish brown bugs called lice. Lice lay many white eggs (nits) in the hair. Head lice is spread easily from person to person, and sometimes can be difficult to get rid of. Head lice bites can make a child's scalp itchy and irritated.

WHAT ARE THE SIGNS & SYMPTOMS OF HEAD LICE?

- Adult lice and nits
 - Adult lice are no bigger than a sesame seed and are grayish white or tan. They move quickly and are difficult to see.
 - Nits are easier to see than the lice. Nits are tiny white specks attached to hairs. Unlike dandruff or sand, nits cannot be shaken off the hair shafts.
- Scratching
 - Itching of the scalp is the main symptom.
- Small red bumps or sores from scratching.
 - A scalp rash may be present. The back of the neck is a favorite area.
 - Scratching a lot may lead to a bacterial infection. Watch for swollen lymph nodes on the back or front of the neck, and red, tender skin that might have crusting and oozing.

HOW IS HEAD LICE TREATED?

The two main ways to treat lice are by using medicine and removing by hand. **No medicine is 100% effective; therefore, it is essential to pick the nits/lice out of the hair as well.**

Medicine

Medicated shampoos, cream rinses, and lotions are available that kill lice. These may be over-the-counter (OTC) or prescription medications. Nix anti-lice creme rinse is often recommended as it is OTC, cheap, and safe to use for 2 months of age and older.

General directions:

1. Wash hair with a regular shampoo.
Do NOT use a conditioner as it can interfere with the lice shampoo and make it less effective.
2. Towel dry hair before using the anti-lice shampoo.
3. Pour 2 ounces (full bottle or 60 mL) of anti-lice shampoo into damp hair. People with long hair may need to use 2 bottles.

4. Work anti-lice shampoo into all the hair down to the roots. If needed, add a little warm water to work up a lather.
5. Leave the shampoo on for a full 10 minutes. If you do not, it will not kill all the lice.
6. Rinse the hair well with water and dry it with a towel.
7. **REPEAT** the anti-lice shampoo in 7-10 days. This step is very important. Two treatments are always needed as inevitably some eggs/nits are missed with the first treatment. These hatch every 7-10 days; therefore, the second treatment will kill any new lice that have hatched from eggs.

Removing by Hand

Removing lice and nits by hand can finish the job if the medicine did not completely rid your child of lice. It is also an option for anyone who doesn't want to use an insecticide. This procedure may take 15 to 60 minutes depending on the thickness/length of hair.

Directions:

1. Get the hair completely wet, squeezing out any excess water.
2. Coat hair with a lubricant, such as hair conditioner or olive oil.
3. Use a hair clip to separate the hair into a small section. 1-inch sections are easier to handle.
4. Using a fine-toothed lice comb, slowly moving across the whole scalp, comb every section of hair multiple times. Rinse out the comb often under hot water.
We recommend the "Nit Free Terminator Lice Comb." You can find this on Amazon.
5. Once you've combed all of the hair, wash the hair with shampoo, rinse, and repeat. Then dry the hair.
6. Wash any towels you used and clean the comb thoroughly. Soak the comb in a 10 percent bleach solution for 30 minutes, and then rinse it well.

Follow these steps every day for one week. Then, perform repeat sessions every 3-4 days for 3 weeks after the last live lice was seen.

NOTE: Oily home products, such as Mayonnaise or Petroleum Jelly, are often used to try to suffocate head lice. However, these treatments may not be as effective as the above.

ARE HEAD LICE CONTAGIOUS?

Head lice spread quickly from person to person, especially in group settings like schools, childcare centers, slumber parties, sports activities, and camps. They cannot fly or jump, but they have claws that let them crawl and cling to hair. They spread through head-to-head contact, and sharing clothing, bed lines, combs, brushes, and hats. Pets cannot catch head lice and pass them on to people or the other way around.

HOW TO PREVENT HEAD LICE?

To get rid of head lice and their eggs, and to help prevent them from coming back:

- Wash all bed linens, stuffed animals, and clothing used during the 2 days before treatment. Was in very hot water (130F), then put them in the hot cycle of the dryer for at least 20 minutes.
- Items that cannot be washed may be dry-cleaned or stored in a sealed plastic bag for 2 weeks.
- Vacuum carpets and any upholstered furniture (in your home or car).
- Soak hair-care items like combs, barrettes, hair ties or bands, headbands, and brushes in hot water or throw them away. Tell kids not to share these items.
- Because lice easily pass from person to person in the same house, check all family members. Treat everyone who has lice so they won't pass it back and forth.
- Tell kids to try to avoid head-to-head contact at school and while playing at home with other children.
- Every 3 or 4 days, check kids who had close contact with a person who has lice. Then, treat any who have lice or nits to the scalp.

WHEN TO CALL THE DOCTOR

If your child has lice 2 weeks after you started treatment or if your child's scalp looks infected, call your doctor.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

There are professional lice treatment centers that remove lice and nits for a fee. These services are effective, but often costly. Lice treatment centers in NWA include:

Lice Clinics of America – Northwest Arkansas

207 E Monroe Ave, Suite D
Lowell, AR 72745

Phone: 479-717-9204

Website: <https://liceclinicsmidsouth.com/nwa/>

Nits End Lice Experts – Lice Lady (Lindsey Kegley)

800 3rd Ave SW
Gravette, AR 72736

Phone: 479-367-4566

Website: <https://www.nits-end.com/>

This handout was adapted with information used from Kids Health, AAP Pediatric Patient Education, and UpToDate. (3/2022)