

Pediculosis (Head Lice) Fact Sheet

What is pediculosis?

- Head lice are tiny grey to brown insects about the size of a sesame seed that live in human hair and must feed on human blood to live.
- They lay tiny white oval-shaped eggs about the size of a knot in a thread called nits that lice glue to each strand of hair close to the scalp. Although it is hard to see head lice, a person can see the nits if they look closely.
- Nits are most often found in the hair behind the ears and at the back of the head and neck. The first sign of head lice is itching of the head which is caused by the bite of the head lice.

Facts about nits from the School Nurse Network Newsletter

Nits are egg sacs of lice that attach themselves to the base of human hairs by nature's own superglue. A single head louse may deposit 90 nits in her 30 day cycle. The nits appear as small pearly, oval specks that bear an uncanny resemblance to dandruff. They are extremely difficult to remove, especially the hatched eggs that are close to the scalp. Any nits that are not killed may hatch and re-infest the hair in 7 to 10 days, which is why a second treatment is required. Nits are not infectious. There is no currently marketed pediculicide which will kill the eggs. They can be removed only by picking them off one by one or by using a special NIT comb.

How do you get head lice?

- Head lice happen mostly with elementary school-aged children.
- Children get lice from other children through head to head contact during play, sports or nap time and most often in school settings.
- Sometimes sharing combs, hats, or school lockers with a child with head lice can spread head lice.
- You can't spread nits.... only live lice.
- Head lice do NOT spread disease.
- Any child can get head lice. It doesn't matter where they live or go to school. It doesn't mean the child is sick or unclean.

How do you get rid of head lice?

- Call your doctor for his/her recommendation for treatment. Follow directions on the packaging exactly.
- Remove as many nits as possible with a special nit comb that comes with the head lice treatment. A regular tooth comb will not effectively remove the nits. Please see the 5-Steps to Nit Removal below.
- Treat your home on the same day that you treat your child. Do the following:
 - Discard any hair care items, or soak combs and brushes in some of the lice shampoo or rubbing alcohol for 1 hour and then wash in very hot water for 5-10 minutes.
 - Wash sheets, blankets, and other bedding in the hottest setting of water in the washing machine.
 - Seal items that can not be washed in a plastic bag for 2 weeks.
 - Dry clean any clothing, bed linens, and stuffed animals that are not machine washable.
 - Vacuum carpets, mattresses and any cloth-covered furniture in your home or car thoroughly.
- Even though your child's head has been treated, please continue to check your child's head every day for the next two weeks, even if you don't see any nits or lice.

- Treat hair for a second time after 7 days (or follow manufacture's instructions on packaging) to make sure that you kill any lice that may have hatched from the nits that might have been missed during the combing, before they lay eggs.
- There is no need to cut hair. Lice like to crawl on short hair just as much as long hair and they need the same amount of treatment.

5 Steps to Nit Removal

1. While hair is still wet comb with your regular comb to remove snarls and tangles. Part hair into four sections.
2. Starting at the top of the head from any one of the four parted sections, lift a one inch wide tuft of hair up and away from the scalp.
3. Take the special nit removal comb in your other hand and place the teeth of the comb as close to the scalp as possible. Comb slowly away from the scalp to the end of the hair being careful to comb the entire length of each one inch section of hair.
4. Clip or pin back nit free strands; continue to combing and pinning until the entire section is free of nits and lice. Wipe nits from the comb frequently with a tissue.
5. Repeat steps 2 - 4 for the remaining sections. Always comb away from the top of the head to prevent re-infestation of combed hair. This may take some time if the hair is long and thick. If the hair dries during the combing, wet it again with water.

How do you keep lice from coming back?

- Teach family members to recognize nits and how lice are spread, check everyone's hair every day for 2 weeks and then periodically.
- If you find head lice, follow the recommended treatment closely. It should be reported to the school nurse.
- Do not lie on bedding, pillows and carpets that have recently been used by someone with lice.
- Remind children not to share combs, brushes, hair accessories, hats, clothing, bedding, coats, etc.