



Lice in children

Lice are small, wingless insects about the size of a sesame seed. Lice lay up to 3 to 5 eggs a day. The eggs are called “nits.” The nits hatch in 7 to 10 days. In another 7 to 10 days, a female louse matures and begins laying her own eggs.

Head lice is a common problem in children in day-care centers and schools. They are annoying, but they are not dangerous and they don't spread disease. They thrive on human blood and can survive longer than 30 days. In general, head lice can't survive longer than 24 hours off their human host. Lice can also infest areas of the body other than the scalp. This is called body lice. Lice on the hair around the groin is called pubic lice.

SIGNS & SYMPTOMS

- Nits can be seen on the hair. They are small yellowish-white, oval-shaped eggs that look like dandruff. Instead of flaking off the scalp, they stick firmly to the base of a hair shaft.
- Itching of the scalp is intense.
- Small, red bumps appear on the scalp and neck.
- When hatched, head lice are clear in color, so are hard to see.

CAUSES

Head lice does not imply poor hygiene. It is caused by the spread of the insects through direct contact of the hair or head with someone who has head lice. Sharing hats, towels, combs, helmets, etc. with an infected person can spread lice. Using pillows, head rests, etc. that an infected person used may also spread lice. Head lice don't fly or jump, so can't be spread through the air.

TREATMENT

Ask your child's doctor about safe and nontoxic methods to treat lice. He or she may advise using an over-the-counter or prescribed medicine. Use the product as directed.



TRIAGE QUESTIONS

Does the child have any of these problems?

- Open sores are on the head from scratching.
- Lice or nits are found in the child's eyebrows, eyelashes, hair, or skin.
- Red bite marks are seen on the scalp. The child's head itches. Lymph glands in the child's neck are swollen.
- With lice, the child has a chronic illness like asthma, cancer, epilepsy, etc. Or, the child is under 2 years old.



NO
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YES ▶

CALL DOCTOR



USE SELF-CARE



SELF-CARE

Check everyone in your home for lice and nits. Treat only those who have lice. Lice-killing products won't prevent lice.

- Use an over-the-counter shampoo, lotion, or cream made to get rid of lice and nits. Follow the directions on the package.
- Wear plastic or latex gloves. Don't use too much shampoo. Doing this will make the child's head too dry.

Things to Tell Your Child

- Don't share hats, brushes, or combs. If you must share helmets, wipe them with a damp towel and wear a baseball cap under the helmet.
- Don't lie on a pillow that another child uses.
- Wash your hair and bathe often.



To Remove the Nits

- Shine a flashlight on the hair roots. Nits are gray and hard to see, especially in blond hair.
- Start at one spot and go row by row or even strand by strand. Use the nit comb that comes in the package. Dip the comb in vinegar first. This will help loosen the nits.
- Comb the hair from the roots to the ends. Check the comb for nits after each pass, or, break the hair up into 4 or 5 sections with hair clips. Lift about an inch of hair up and out. Put the comb against your child's head. Comb all the way to the tips of the hair. Keep going until you've done the whole head.
- Soak all combs, brushes, hair clips, and barrettes for 1 to 2 hours in the insecticidal shampoo. Or, soak them for 1 hour in soap and water, rubbing alcohol, or Lysol.
- Check for nits every 2 to 3 days for 2 to 3 weeks until all lice and nits are gone.
- A week to 9 days later, use the shampoo for lice again to kill any newly hatched nits. You don't have to remove nits after treatment is finished except for cosmetic reasons.



Other Things You Should Do

- Vacuum all mattresses, pillows, rugs, and furniture made of cloth, especially where children play. Use the long, thin attachment to suck the lice or nits out of car seats, toys, etc. Put the vacuum cleaner bags outside in the trash.
- Wash bedding and clothes right away in water 130°F or hotter. Put them in the dryer on high for 30 minutes. Heat kills the lice and nits. Dry-clean clothes and hats that you can't wash.
- Don't use bug spray on lice, furniture, stuffed animals, etc.
- As soon as you know your child has lice, call your child's school, child-care center, parents of your child's friends, etc.
- Check your children for head lice and nits once a week. Check more often if your child scratches his or her head. Look for nits behind the ears and on the back of the neck. Spread hairs apart using a nit comb to look for the nits on the hair shafts.



FOR MORE INFORMATION:

National Pediculosis Association
headlice.org