



# Head lice

Head lice are very small, brownish-colored insects that live on the head. They are less than 1/8" long, about this size [--] or that of a sesame seed. They lay tiny, oval-shaped eggs (nits) close to the scalp that are greyish or white in color.

## Fast facts:

- Head lice do not live longer than 48 hours off the head.
- Adult lice can lay up to 8 nits per day.
- If your child is infested with lice it will take 7 to 10 days from the time the eggs are laid until they hatch.
- Treat your child for head lice and check child's head to remove nits daily.
- If all nits within ¼ inch (about the length of a grain of rice) of the scalp are not removed, some may hatch and your child will be infested again.
- Treat only household members with head lice and treat them all at once.

## If you think your child has head lice:

- Tell your childcare provider or call the school.
- Children do not need to stay home from childcare and school, but it is recommended that they be treated for head lice. Your child should be encouraged to avoid head-to-head contact with other children.
- For more information, call HSPHD-Epidemiology at 612-543-5230 or your local health department.

## Parent/Guardian information

### Symptoms

Itching of the head and neck. Look for: 1) crawling lice in the hair, usually there aren't very many; 2) eggs (nits) glued to the hair, often found behind the ears and at the back of the neck; and 3) scratch marks on the head or back of the neck at the hairline.

### Spread

- By head-to-head contact.
- By sharing personal items that come in contact with the head (combs, brushes, hats, etc.).

Lice do not jump or fly; they crawl and can fall off the head. Lice do not spread to or from pets.

## Head lice

### Contagious period

Until successfully treated with a lice killing product. **It takes at least 2 weeks to get rid of head lice.**

### Call your health care provider

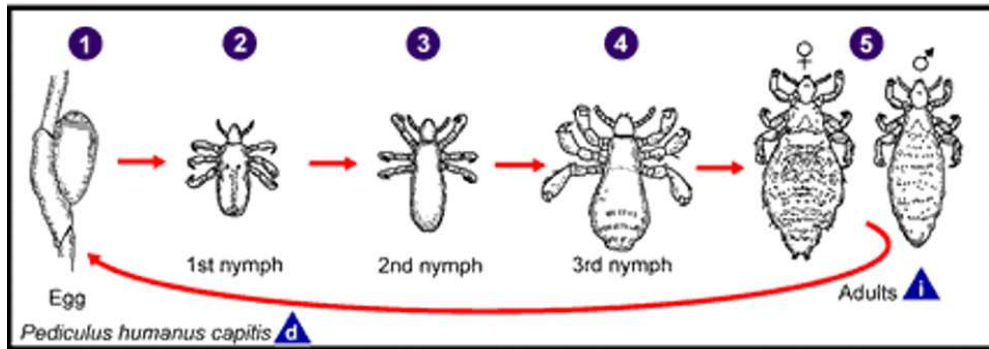
- Call your health care provider or pharmacy for advice about treatment. Recommended treatment includes using either a store-bought or prescription lice killing product.
- Follow the product directions carefully. With certain products a second treatment is recommended 7 to 10 days later. Lice treatment products are not 100% effective in killing lice, especially the eggs (nits).
- Removing the nits (nitpicking) is an important part of the treatment for controlling head lice. The nits are glued onto the hair shaft as they are laid and require effort to remove. Nits beyond  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch (about the length of a grain of rice) are likely hatched or dead. See the next page for nitpicking instructions. **Continue checking the head and combing hair daily for 2 weeks.**

### Prevention

- Encourage your child to avoid head-to-head contact with others.
- Check your child's head every month. If one person in the home has head lice, others should be checked too.
- Never share hair grooming items or hair accessories (barrettes, combs, brushes, etc.). Clean all hair items by soaking in a lice treatment product for 10 minutes or cleaning with hot, soapy, or boiling water for 5 minutes.
- Never share towels, bedding, clothing, hats, and headgear.
- Vacuum carpets, upholstered furniture, mattresses, and seats in the car(s) thoroughly. **Insecticide sprays are not recommended** because this will expose household members to unnecessary pesticides.
- Wash clothing worn in the last 3 days (e.g., jackets, hats, scarves, pajamas), bedding, and towels in hot water and dry in a hot dryer for at least 20 minutes before using again. Clothing, stuffed toys, linens, or backpacks that cannot be washed or dried can be dry cleaned or sealed in a plastic bag for 2 weeks.

## Head lice

### Head lice life cycle



Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2019a, September 11). CDC - lice - head lice - biology. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. <https://www.cdc.gov/parasites/lice/head/biology.html>

### How to remove nits

Work in a well-lit room or under a bright lamp (using a magnifying glass may help you see the nits).

- Divide the hair into 4 parts and divide each part into 1-inch sections.
- Starting at the scalp, use a metal nit comb, cat flea comb, or your fingernails to comb each hair section individually.
- Use the comb or your fingernails to slide eggs off the hair shaft or use scissors to cut hair shafts that have nits glued to them.
- Remove all nits within  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch from the scalp each time you comb the hair.
- Remember: It can take at least 2 weeks to get rid of lice.



More information about head lice can be found on the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) website. Go to [www.health.state.mn.us](http://www.health.state.mn.us). In the search box type "head lice."

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