

HEAD LICE TIPS

Head lice are a common problem in school. The following tips are meant to be helpful for parents working to get rid of lice.

What are you looking for? Lice are grayish-white sometimes with dark margins, diamond shaped, and the size of a sesame seed. They are found in the hair and on the scalp. Lice eggs, called nits, are translucent, silvery-white oval specks firmly attached (cemented) to the hair shaft, not the scalp. They may appear as dandruff (in blond hair they may appear as sand), but can not be brushed or shaken off the hair. Most often nits are found around the ears, nape of neck, in braids, or around barrettes. However, live nits may be found throughout the hair and at any length. People with lice may complain of itching that gets worse as the infestation increases.

How are lice spread? Lice are most commonly spread by head to head contact or by sharing combs, brushes, hats and helmets. Lice crawl quickly. Lice do not jump, hop or fly. Lice are not a result of poor hygiene. Lice favor a clean head. A louse lays about six eggs a day. The eggs (nits) hatch in 8-10 days and it takes another 8-10 days for the louse to mature enough to lay eggs of its own. A louse lives for about 30 days. Lice require a blood meal from the scalp to live. Lice can live off a human scalp for 24-36 hours (longer in very warm and humid climates). Nits need a human blood meal within 45 minutes of hatching to survive. Lice are not spread to pets.

What do you do if you find them? Remain calm. Lice carry no diseases. Tell anyone that may have been exposed so early treatment can occur if needed. The quicker a case of head lice is discovered and treated, the easier it will be to get rid of an infestation.

- Treat the scalp (over the sink) with a lice killing shampoo. Follow the directions on the package. These shampoos are pesticides. Never use a lice killing shampoo if you are pregnant, nursing or on an infant. Do not use lice killing shampoos more than recommended on package. Some lice are resistant to the lice killing shampoo. Lice are difficult to kill in the nymph stage (day 1-4 of life cycle). Based on the life cycle of the louse, the lice killing shampoo application is repeated in 9 days to provide a more complete lice killing opportunity. Nit picking is essential in all cases of head lice for getting rid of the head lice.
- Removing lice eggs (nits) is the key to lice management. A daily nit check with nit removal is advisable for at least 14 days following treatment with a lice killing shampoo. Nit picking can be a long process especially during the early days of treatment. Check for nits in clean dry hair.
- It is important to use a metal fine toothed comb for combing out the hair to remove lice/nits. There are many lice combs available. Part the hair with your fingers taking a small section of hair at a time, comb from the scalp to the end of the hair. As you comb inspect the shaft for a nit. Remove the nit by grasping it with your fingernail and sliding it off the hair shaft. Discard the nit on a tissue. Many nits are not removed with the comb and must be manually removed.
- Alternative treatments to lice killing shampoos are available such as smothering techniques. Olive oil is often used to help slow the lice down for easier removal. The scalp and hair are saturated in olive oil for 8 hrs every four days for three weeks. This is usually completed while the person sleeps. The oiled hair is carefully combed with a metal comb removing lice and nits. After combing out lice and nits, the hair is washed thoroughly to remove the oil. Check for nits again after the hair has been dried and remove any more nits found. Lice are killed by dry heat. Use a hair dryer to dry the hair.

- Daily head checks can be reduced when there have been no nits found on the head for two weeks. Continue to check the head regularly for several weeks to avoid a re-infestation. It only takes a few missed nits (that hatch into lice) to continue the infestation. A monthly head check is recommended for all school children.

What you need to know: Nit removal takes time. Be patient and take breaks when needed. Ask for help if needed. Lice are common, many family and friends have experience with lice removal. Today there are many resources available to parents working to rid their children's head of lice. The web site www.headlice.org is the official web site for the National Pediculosis Association. There are also professional nit picking agencies available to help parents with lice management. Nit Wits is located at 22 Notre Dame Ave, Cambridge, MA 617-816-9487 and offers appointments to come to their office for lice management and nit picking services. The Professional Nit Picker comes to your house and can be reached at 781-449-2283.

FOCUS YOUR TIME AND ENERGY ON REMOVING THE LICE AND NITS FROM THE SCALP!

What about combs and brushes? Do not share combs and brushes (and other items used for the hair or the head) among family members. Once a person in the family has lice, all combs and brushes should be soaked in hot water (150 degrees F) for 20 minutes. Make sure to clean all combs after use during a lice infestation.

What about clothes and other personal items? Place all clothing, bedding, towels, sleeping bags, etc that have been used for the past 48 hrs by the person with lice into the dryer on high setting for 20-30 to kill lice. Dry heat kills lice. Repeated washing is not needed. Wash personal items as you normally would. It is recommended to put the pillow case, jacket, hat, scarf and other personal items daily through into the dryer for 20 minutes to kill any lice that happened to crawl onto these items. It is also possible to visually inspect these items and remove any lice or hairs found on them and discard them.

What about cleaning the house? There is no need to turn into a cleaning machine about the house. Anything that can not be put into the dryer can be vacuumed, such as large stuffed animals, upholstered furniture, rugs and pillows. Vacuum places where people rest their heads frequently. Brushing surfaces with a sticky lint brush is also effective in removing lice/nits if vacuuming is not appropriate or desired. There is no need clean every corner and crevice of the house because lice do not live off the scalp more than 36 hours. If no one has entered a room for over 48 hours, nothing needs to be cleaned because there is no concern about live lice.

What about the car and other modes of transportation? Vacuum the car or use a sticky lint brush on head rests. Again, it is possible to see any lice and manually remove them. Some people bring their sticky lint removers with them on planes, trains and in movie theaters.

What about toys and stuffed animals? Plush toys and stuffed animals are placed in a plastic bag for 48 hours. The old recommendation which was for much longer, 14-30 days has been revised after studies done on how long lice survive off the human scalp.

HEAD LICE IS MOST OFTEN SPREAD THROUGH HEAD TO HEAD CONTACT.

Information Source-Head Lice to Dead Lice by Joan Sawyer and Roberta MacPhee

