



PEDICULOSIS (HEAD LICE)

FACT SHEET

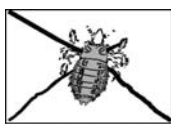
Head lice are not a health hazard, but rather a social nuisance. Anyone, regardless of age, gender, race or social class, can get head lice at any time. School age children are especially vulnerable because they are often in head-to-head contact.

Information about head lice for parents/guardians and student to help with:

- education
- prevention
- detection, and
- treatment

What are Head Lice?

- Head lice are tiny insects without wings. They cannot fly or jump. They live mostly on the hair and head and are usually behind the ears or the back of the neck. They can also live in eyebrows, eyelashes and beards.
- Adult head lice are 1-2 mm long and greyish-brown in colour. They cling to the hair with six hook-like claws and cannot be shaken off. They are very difficult to see.
- Nits are the eggs, half the size of a pinhead and oval in shape. They may look like dandruff, but are firmly glued to the hair and cannot be flicked off. New eggs, laid next to the scalp, are off white to brown in colour and are difficult to see.
- The first and most common sign of head lice is persistent itching and scratching. Other suspicious signs include scratch marks or rash-like marks on the neck and scalp. Other scalp conditions may cause itching and the only sure way to detect lice is to take a thorough look.



Mature head louse grasping crossed hairs.

Getting Rid of Head Lice

Treatments vary. If you choose to use a head lice shampoo, consult your pharmacist or doctor. You do not need a prescription. (Families on social assistance may, through a doctor's prescription, have a shampoo covered.)

Head lice products do not prevent lice. Use them only when nits or lice are present. Costs and risks associated with products vary, so discuss with your pharmacist.

Also consult a pharmacist if:

- treating children under 4;
- treatment provider is pregnant or breastfeeding;
- lice/nits are in eyelashes, eyebrows or beards;
- scalp is broken or infected; and
- the child has a ragweed allergy.

Follow product instructions carefully.

Many treatments recommend a second application again in 7 to 10 days. After the second treatment, continue to check for nits daily for at least two weeks.

Continue to remove nits by hand. **Do not treat children who are not infested.**

How Else Can I Get Rid of Head Lice?

Non-Pharmaceutical Options

Some people are uncomfortable with the use of a chemical-based treatment. The most critical part of any treatment is the removal of all lice and nits.

There are natural treatments available with varying results. Consult your local health food store or natural health practitioner for suggestions.

To Remove Nits

Head lice products used properly, can often be effective, but nits may still be present. Nits must be removed. If they are not, nits may hatch, resulting in reinfestation. Nits must be removed by hand.

- Bright, natural light is important to see nits.

- Comb the hair to remove tangles. Take hold of a small shaft of hair. Use your thumb nail against your forefinger and squeeze the nit from the hair. Start at the top of the shaft of hair, close to the scalp, and run your thumb and finger to the bottom of the hair strand. Put the nits in a plastic bag.
- Special nit combs are also available. However, using only a nit comb may not remove all the nits. It is recommended that a nit comb be used in combination with removing the nits by hand. Place nits in a bag, seal and put in the garbage.
- Continue section by section until all the nits are removed. Seal the bag and put it in the garbage.

Some people find nits easier to remove if they put petroleum jelly on the hair first or rinse the hair with a solution of one tablespoon of vinegar and one cup of water.

Close Contacts

If head lice are detected on a member of your family, check the heads of the entire family. Notify others who may have been in contact, such as grandparents, babysitters and friends.

Contact your child's school, day care, sports groups or any other groups he/she has had contact with if head lice or nits are detected.

Personal Items and Clothing

The focus of head lice treatment must be to remove lice and nits from the hair and head. However, lice can get into personal items, articles of clothing and can live off the head for up to 48 hours.

- Wash all bedding, clothing and towels in very hot water and dry using the hot cycle of the dryer. The heat will destroy the lice and nits.
- Items (i.e. stuffed toys) that cannot be washed should be dry-cleaned or sealed in a plastic bag for two weeks.
- Combs and brushes should be cleaned to remove hair and disinfected by soaking in a head lice shampoo or disinfectant.
- Vacuum loose hairs from carpets and upholstery. Discard the vacuum bag in a sealed plastic bag.

Points to Remember

1. Parents/guardians are responsible for ensuring children are lice and nit free.
2. Examine your child's head on a regular basis (i.e. weekly, after vacations). If you detect head lice, notify the school or daycare. Take immediate action.
3. Lack of cleanliness does not cause head lice. Head lice prefer clean scalps.
4. Discourage children from sharing hats, combs, brushes and hair accessories.
5. Keeping hair short will not prevent head lice. Children with long hair should have their hair tied back.
6. Head lice do not live on dogs, cats, or other animals, only on humans.

For More Information

National Pediculosis Association

www.headlice.org

1-781-449-NITS

Canadian Paediatric Society

www.caringforkids.cps.ca

Lice Advice Hotline

1-800-783-1919

(Paid for by a manufacturer of a nit removal product)

www.eoginesis.com

www.neonnits.com

Durham Region Health Department

1-800-841-2729 or 905-668-7711

www.durham.ca



The Kawartha Pine Ridge District School Board works in partnership with parents/guardians to ensure that students attend school lice free in accordance with Board Policy No. ES-1.2, Pediculosis in Schools.