**Head lice**

The head louse is a tiny, wingless parasitic insect that lives among human hairs and feeds on tiny amounts of blood drawn from the scalp. Lice are a very common problem, especially for kids. They're contagious, annoying, and sometimes tough to get rid of. They can spread quickly, especially in group settings (like schools, childcare centers, sports activities, and camps).

They spread mainly through head-to-head contact, but sharing clothing, bed linens, combs, brushes, and hats also can pass them along. Kids are most prone to catching lice because they tend to have close physical contact with each other and share personal items.

But while they're frustrating to deal with, lice aren't dangerous. They don't spread disease, although their bites can make a child's scalp itchy and irritated, and scratching can lead to infection.

**Signs of Head Lice**

•severe itching of the scalp

•nits

•live lice

•small red bumps on the scalp

•a rash on the scalp, with crusting and oozing (if severe)

•swollen lymph glands in the neck

Although they're very small, lice can be seen by the naked eye.

Nits (lice eggs look) like tiny yellow, tan, or brown dots before they hatch. Lice lay nits on hair shafts close to the scalp, where the temperature is perfect for keeping warm until they hatch. Nits look sort of like dandruff, only they can't be removed by brushing or shaking them off.

Lice eggs hatch within 1 to 2 weeks after they're laid. After hatching, the remaining shell looks white or clear and stays firmly attached to the hair shaft.

The adult louse is no bigger than a sesame seed and is grayish-white or tan. Nymphs (baby lice) are smaller and become adult lice about 1 to 2 weeks after they hatch. Most lice feed on blood several times a day, and they can survive up to 2 days off the scalp.

With lice bites come itching and scratching. This is actually due to a reaction to the saliva of lice. However, the itching may not always start right away — that depends on how sensitive a person´s skin is to the lice. It can sometimes take weeks for patients with lice to start scratching.

Excessive scratching can lead to a bacterial infection (this can cause swollen lymph glands and red, tender skin that might have crusting and oozing). The doctor may then treat the infection with an oral antibiotic.

If you discover that your child does, indeed, have lice or nits, contact the staff at the school and childcare center to let them know. Find out what their return policy is. Most usually allow kids to return after one topical treatment has been completed.

*And you may wonder if Fido or Fluffy may be catching the pests and passing them on to your family. But rest assured that pets can't catch head lice and pass them on to people or the other way around.*

**Treatment**

Your doctor can recommend a medicated shampoo, rinse, or lotion to kill the lice. These may be over-the-counter (OTC) or prescription medications, depending on what treatments have already been tried. It´s important to follow the directions exactly because these products are insecticides!!!

Medicated lice treatments usually kill the lice, but it may take a few days for the itching to stop.

After treatment, you may want to comb out the nits with a fine-tooth comb and it is also recommended to repeat treatment in 7 to 10 days to kill any newly hatched nits.

**Removing By Hand**

To remove lice and nits by hand, use a fine-tooth comb on wet, conditioned hair. Wetting the hair beforehand is recommended because it temporarily immobilizes the lice and the conditioner makes it easier to get a comb through the hair.

Though petroleum jelly, mayonnaise, or olive oil are sometimes used in an attempt to suffocate head lice, these treatments may not work. If medicine doesn't work and you want to try these methods, talk to your doctor first.

Make sure you remove nits carefully every week for at least 3 weeks in a row, and watch closely to see if any live lice return.

**Prevention**

These tips can help to prevent you from getting lice:

• try to avoid head-to-head contact at school (in gym, on the playground, or during sports)

• do not share combs, brushes, hats, scarves, bandanas, ribbons, barrettes, hair ties or bands, towels, helmets, or other personal care items with anyone else

• do not lie on bedding, pillows, and carpets that have recently been used by someone with lice

• every 3 or 4 days, examine members of your household who have had close contact with a person who has lice

**Preventing Reinfestation**

Here are some simple ways to get rid of the lice and their eggs, once you got them, and help prevent a lice reinfestation:

• wash all bed linens and clothing that's been recently worn by anyone in your home who's infested in very hot water (130°F [54.4°C]), then put them in the hot cycle of the dryer for at least 20 minutes

• dry clean anything that can't be washed (like stuffed animals), or put them in airtight bags for at least 3 days

• vacuum carpets and any upholstered furniture (car seats as well), then throw away the vacuum cleaner bag

• soak hair-care items like combs, barrettes, hair ties or bands, headbands, and brushes in rubbing alcohol or medicated shampoo for 1 hour; you also can wash them in hot water or just throw them away.

Because lice are easily passed from person to person in the same house, bedmates and infested family members also will need treatment to prevent the lice from coming back.

**Dont's**

In your efforts to get rid of the bugs, there are some things you shouldn't do. Some don'ts of head lice treatment include:

• don't use a hairdryer after applying any of the currently available scalp treatments because some contain flammable ingredients; a hair dryer could also cause live lice to blow into the air and spread to others nearby.

• don't use a conditioner or shampoo/conditioner combination before applying lice medication

• don't wash your hair for 1 to 2 days after using a medicated treatment

• don't use the same medication more than three times on one person, if it doesn't seem to be working, your doctor may recommend another medication

• don't use more than one head lice medication at a time

• don't use essential oils (such as ylang ylang oil or tea tree oil) to treat lice on the scalp, these oils can lead to allergic reactions

• don't use chemicals such as gasoline or kerosene on the hair

Having head lice is not a sign of dirtiness or poor hygiene. Lice can be a problem for people of all ages and socioeconomic levels, no matter how often they do — or don't — wash their hair or bathe. It also doesn't matter how long or short a person's hair is.

**Before x after reading**

*Before reading the text, answer the following questions. Then, after reading, evaluate your answers and correct the false ones.*

1) That´s the newly hatched lice that causes itching.

2) Lice are only active at night.

3) Petroleum jelly is one of the best and widely recommended home remedies for treating lice.

4) Kids have to be kept off school for at least three weeks after getting rid of lice.

5) Using tea tree oil for treating lice can irritate the scalp.

6) When getting wet, lice cannot move quickly and are easier to remove.

7) Lice and nits are visible to the naked eye.

8) Pets are an important carrier of lice.

9) For some people it can take weeks before they start to experience symptoms of lice infestation.

10) There is an effective vaccine against lice.

11) It´s always necessary to trim the hair short to get rid of lice.

12) Lice can survive up to two days off the host.