

HEAD LICE FACT SHEET

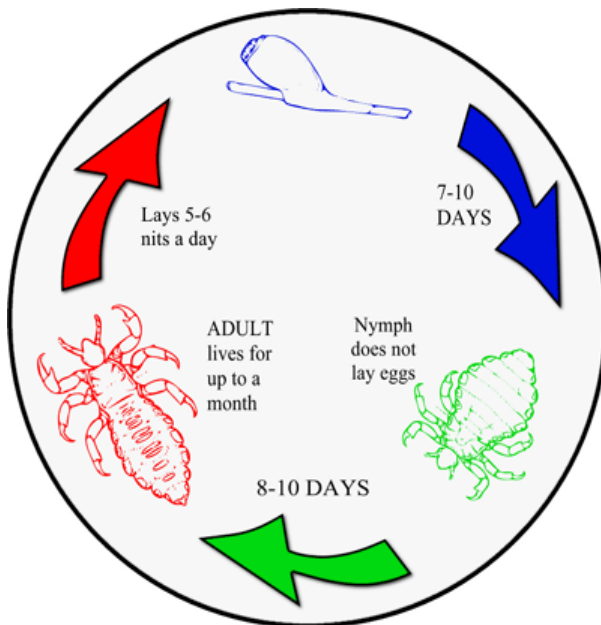
**Head lice are a nuisance but not a health hazard.
Do not panic if you find lice or eggs.**

Head lice are spread by head-to-head contact and very close contact with an infested person. They do not result from a lack of cleanliness. They do not live on pets.

Anyone can get head lice. School children get them more often because they are frequently in close contact with one another. Parents and other close contacts to children can get head lice from children.

What to look for:

Head lice are tiny, flat insects without wings and cannot jump or fly. They crawl quickly from one person's head to another. They are 1-2 mm long and grayish-brown in colour. The adult female lays tiny eggs (nits) close to the scalp and firmly glues them to the hair. Eggs cannot be easily flicked off. Itching and scratching are common signs of head lice. Some people with head lice do not show any signs. The best way to check for head lice is to look for nits.



How to get rid of head lice:

IMPORTANT: Treating head lice requires 2 treatments 7-10 days apart. Remove all nits.

- Get a head lice shampoo/cream rinse from your pharmacy. You will not need a prescription; however you do need to talk to the pharmacist. When choosing a product, read the list of ingredients to ensure that the person being treated is not allergic to the treatment. The pharmacist will answer any questions or concerns that you may have. Follow the directions very carefully.
- Do not use a crème rinse or combination shampoo/conditioner before using lice medicine.
- Do not re-wash hair for 1-2 days after the lice medicine has been used.
- Timing is very important. If the product is rinsed off too soon, all of the lice may not be killed. If it is left on too long, you are causing unneeded exposure to the chemicals.
- Rinsing the child's hair under a tap (instead of a shower/tub) will limit skin exposure and prevent the child from swallowing some of the product.
- These products should not be used near the eyes, nose or mouth. A towel held tightly over the eyes will protect them during the treatment.
- Wear plastic/rubber gloves to avoid unnecessary exposure to the chemical yourself.
- Wash your hands well after using a head lice treatment product.
- Store unused head lice products away from the reach of young children.
- Following the treatment, divide hair into sections and look carefully for nits. Remove all of the nits you find.

Nit removal:

All nits must be removed before your child returns to school. The schools have jurisdiction over the "no nit" policy. The health unit does not provide return to school notes.

- Bright, natural light helps you to see nits.
- Divide hair into small sections and check entire head.
- Nits can be anywhere in the hair and are most often found at the nape of the neck, behind the ears and in the crown area of the head.
- Use your thumbnail against your first finger to strip nits from the hair starting at the roots and moving to the tips.
- You may choose to comb-out the nits with a fine-tooth comb however, nits located very close to the scalp are best removed by hand

Second treatment:

- Head lice products generally kill the head lice but not all of the nits. The second treatment will prevent a nymph from maturing and laying eggs or transferring to another head. After the second treatment and removal of all nits, you should check the head daily for approximately one month to make sure that all of the lice and nits are gone. If the infestation continues after the second treatment you should consult with a doctor.

Close contacts:

- Follow-up of all close contacts is very important to prevent the spread of head lice and to protect your child from being reinfested. Check the heads of all family members and treat those affected at the same time. **Never treat for head lice unless lice and/or nits**

are present. Other close contacts such as grandparents, close friends, caregivers and neighbours may want to be checked too. Tell your child's school, daycare centre and play groups so the parents can be told to check their children's heads.

Environmental cleaning:

- All personal items such as: combs, brushes, headgear, bed linens, towels, and clothing used by the infested person 2 days before first lice treatment is given should be washed in hot, soapy water and put in a hot dryer for 15-20 minutes.
- Items that are not washable can be dry-cleaned or placed in plastic bags and put away for two weeks.
- Vacuuming areas where the infested child has been is helpful.
- Insecticide sprays are not recommended.

Points to Remember:

- An untreated source among close contacts is a common reason for reoccurrence.
- The use of household products such as mayonnaise, petroleum jelly, olive oil or natural agents such as tea tree oil are not scientifically proven to be effective in successfully treating head lice.
- Other products such as gasoline or kerosene are flammable, toxic and very dangerous.
- Call you doctor before using a lice treatment if :
 - you are pregnant or nursing
 - the child is under 2 years of age
 - history of seizure disorders
 - lice on eyebrows, eyelashes or beard
 - skin on scalp is broken or infected