

# HEAD LICE

## Information for School-Aged Children

Head lice infestations are a common problem for children in schools. Anyone can get head lice. There are two other kinds of lice that infest people, but they do not live on the head.

Check your child(ren) for head lice. If you find lice or eggs, use the information provided below.

**CAUSE:** *Pediculus humanus capitis*, a louse.

Head lice are very small (less than 1/8" long, about this size [--]), brownish-colored insects that live on human heads and lay their eggs (nits) close to the scalp. The eggs are tiny (about the size of the eye of a small needle) and gray or white in color. Adult lice move fast and do not like light.

**SYMPTOMS:** Itching of the head and neck. Look for: 1) crawling lice in the hair, usually few in number; 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:** Lice are spread by head-to-head contact and by sharing personal items such as combs (especially on picture day), sharing head gear during sports, brushes, barrettes, hats, scarves, jackets, blankets, sheets, pillowcases, stuffed animals, play activity clothes and hats. Head lice may be spread during sleepovers.

Lice do not jump or fly; they crawl and can fall off the head. Head lice do not live longer than 48 hours off the head. They only lay their eggs while on the head. Nits that are more than 1/2" from the scalp are dead or empty and will not hatch. The eggs do not hatch if they fall off the head. Lice do not spread to or from pets.

**INCUBATION:** It takes 7 to 10 days from when the eggs are laid until they hatch.

**CONTAGIOUS PERIOD:** Until treated with a lice treatment product.

**EXCLUSION:** Until first treatment is completed and no live lice are seen. (Nits are NOT considered live lice.)

**TREATMENT:**

1. Call your healthcare provider or pharmacist for advice. Recommended treatment includes using either a prescription or over-the-counter (OTC) medicated (lice killing) product. Use products that contain permethrin, a synthetic insecticide or a pyrethrin-based shampoo.
2. Follow the product directions carefully (especially the **amount of product to use, length of time on the hair, and whether to use on dry or damp hair**). Directions will vary, depending on the product used.
3. Treat a second time (for certain products) 7 to 10 days later to kill any lice that may have hatched after the first treatment.
4. Allow 24 hours for products to kill lice.
5. Many alternatives to OTC or prescription head lice control products have been suggested. Although there is little scientific evidence to support these treatments, people often use alternative treatments when the usual treatments

**TREATMENT  
CONTINUED:**

haven't worked, or when there is concern about the toxicity of using head lice control products repeatedly. Some of the treatments being used include mayonnaise, oils (vegetable, olive, mineral, etc.), and petroleum jelly (Vaseline). When applied to the hair, these materials may suffocate and/or make it hard for the lice to move, but do nothing to kill the nits. Some of these products are very difficult to remove from the hair.

6. Lice treatment products are not 100% effective in killing lice, especially nits. Removing the nits (nitpicking) is essential part of the treatment for controlling the spread of head lice. The nits are glued onto the hair shaft as they are laid, and require effort to remove. To remove the nits use a metal nit comb, cat flea comb, or your fingernails to slide eggs off the hair shafts, or use scissors to cut the hair shafts that have nits glued to them. Continue checking the head and combing hair daily for 2 weeks. If all nits within ½" of the scalp are not removed, some may hatch and the child will be infested again. **Remember: it takes at least 2 weeks to get rid of lice.**
7. Check all household members for head lice. Treat only household members with head lice, and treat all at the same time.

**PREVENTION/CONTROL:**

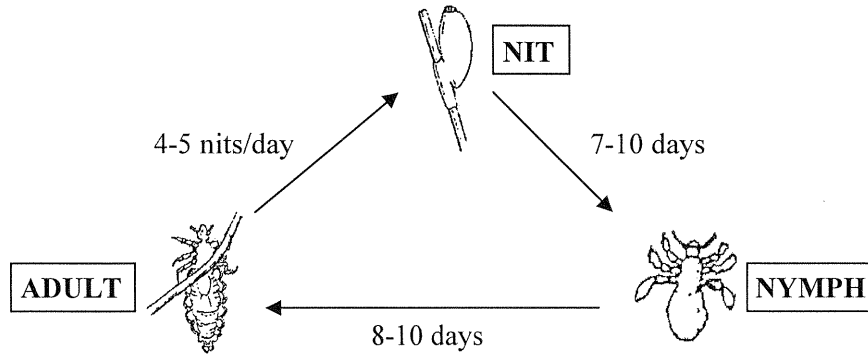
1. DO NOT share combs, brushes, other hair grooming items and other hair accessories (barrettes, etc.), towels, bedding, clothing, hats, and headgear, such as personal headphones and sports helmets.
2. Hang coats, jackets, and caps in individual lockers or on assigned coat hooks.
3. Check your child's head frequently throughout the year. If one person in a household, school, etc., has head lice, check others also. Sleepovers are a common setting in which head lice are spread. When your child returns from a sleepover, check the child's head and launder any bedding that they brought home.
4. Clean all combs, brushes, other hair grooming items and accessories (barrettes, etc.) by doing one of the following:
  - a. soaking in the treatment product for 10 minutes.
  - b. cleaning with hot soapy water.
  - c. boiling for 5 minutes.
5. 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.
6. Wash clothing worn in the last 3 days (e.g., jackets, hats, scarves, pajamas), bedding, and towels in hot (130° F or higher) water and dry in a hot dryer for at least 20 minutes before using again. Clothing that cannot be washed or dried, linens, and stuffed toys can be dry cleaned or sealed in plastic bags for 2 weeks.

For more information, you or your healthcare provider may call Hennepin County Community Health Department at (952) 351-5230, or call your local health department.

## HEAD LICE

Prepared by Hennepin County Community Health Department with the support of the local and state disease prevention and control staff and childcare consultants.

### HEAD LICE LIFE CYCLE

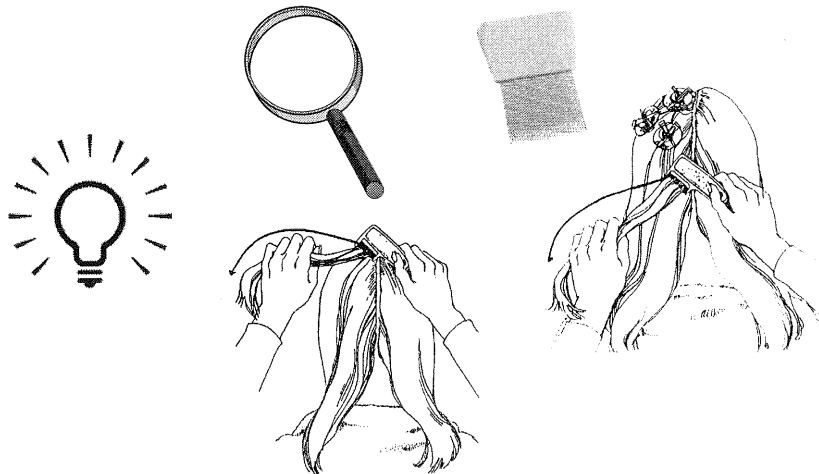


#### How to Remove Nits

**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 sections and divide each section into 1-inch strands.
- Use a metal nit comb or a cat flea comb or your fingernails to slide eggs off the hair shafts, or use scissors to cut hair shafts that have nits glued to them.
- Comb each hair strand individually with a nit comb starting from the scalp.
- Remove all nits.
- **REMEMBER:** it can take at least 2 weeks to get rid of lice.

#### TOOLS FOR NIT PICKING



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