

HEAD LICE

PREVENTION/CONTROL, SIGNS/SYMPTOMS & TREATMENTS

Head lice are spread most commonly by direct head-to-head (hair-to-hair) contact. However, much less frequently they are spread by sharing clothing or belongings onto which lice have crawled or nits attached to shed hairs may have fallen. The risk of getting infested by a louse that has fallen onto a carpet or furniture is very small. Head lice survive less than 1–2 days if they fall off a person and cannot feed; nits cannot hatch and usually die within a week if they are not kept at the same temperature as that found close to the scalp.

PREVENTION & CONTROL:

The following are steps that can be taken to help prevent and control the spread of head lice:

- Avoid head-to-head (hair-to-hair) contact during play and other activities at home, school, and elsewhere (sports activities, playground, slumber parties, camp).
- Do not share clothing such as hats, scarves, coats, sports uniforms, hair ribbons, or barrettes.
- Do not share combs, brushes, or towels. Disinfest combs and brushes used by an infested person by soaking them in hot water (at least 130°F) for 5–10 minutes.
- Do not lie on beds, couches, pillows, carpets, or stuffed animals that have recently been in contact with an infested person.
- Machine wash and dry clothing, bed linens, and other items that an infested person wore or used during the 2 days before treatment using the hot water (130°F) laundry cycle and the high heat drying cycle. Clothing and items that are not washable can be dry-cleaned OR sealed in a plastic bag and stored for 2 weeks.
- Vacuum the floor and furniture, particularly where the infested person sat or lay. However, spending much time and money on house cleaning activities is not necessary to avoid reinfestation by lice or nits that may have fallen off the head or crawled onto furniture or clothing.
- Do not use fumigant sprays or fogs; they are not necessary to control head lice and can be toxic if inhaled or absorbed through the skin.

[CDC - Lice - Head Lice - Prevention & Control](#)
[Head Lice: What Parents Need to Know - HealthyChildren.org](#)

SIGNS & SYMPTOMS:

What are the signs and symptoms of head lice infestation?

- Tickling feeling of something moving in the hair.
- Itching, caused by an allergic reaction to the bites of the head louse.
- Irritability and difficulty sleeping; head lice are most active in the dark.
- Sores on the head caused by scratching. These sores can sometimes become infected with bacteria found on the person's skin.
- See [How to Examine for Head Lice](#) flier below

TREATMENTS:

You may want to check with your child's doctor before beginning any head lice treatment. The most effective way to treat head lice is with head lice medicine. After each treatment, using the comb-out method every 2 to 3 days for 2 to 3 weeks may help remove the nits and eggs.

- Head lice medicine should be used only when it is certain that your child has living head lice. Also, when head lice medicines are used, it is important to use them safely as directed.
- [Checklist for Head Lice Removal](#)

[CDC - Lice - Head Lice - Treatment](#)
[Head Lice: Treatment Myths & Realities - HealthyChildren.org](#)

Over the counter and prescription medicines are available. See chart, below, for a list of head lice medicines approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration.

Head Lice Medicines

<p>Permethrin lotion (1%)</p> <p>Brand name products: Nix, Elimite and Acticin</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● No prescription needed. ● Apply to shampooed and towel-dried hair; then rinse off after 10 minutes. Do not shampoo for 24-48 hours afterward. ● Kills lice; does not kill lice eggs. ● Retreatment is recommended between days 9 and 10 if live lice are seen. ● Approved for use in children 2 months and older.
<p>Pyrethrin-based product (shampoo or hair mousse)</p> <p>Brand name products: RID, A-200, Pronto, R&C, Triple X and Licide</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● No prescription needed. ● Apply to dry hair and rinse off after 10 minutes. Do not shampoo for 24-48 hours afterwards. ● Kills lice; does not kill lice eggs. ● Retreatment is recommended between days 9 and 10. ● Approved for use in children 2 years and older.
<p>Ivermectin lotion (0.5%)</p> <p>Brand name product: Sklice</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● No prescription needed. ● Apply to dry hair and rinse off after 10 minutes. Do not shampoo for 24-48 hours afterwards. ● Kills lice; does not kill lice eggs. However, it prevents newly hatched lice from living. ● Only 1 application is needed. ● Do not use veterinary formulations of ivermectin. ● Approved for use in infants and children 6 months and older.
<p>Malathion lotion (0.5%)</p> <p>Brand name product: Ovide</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Prescription needed. ● Apply to dry hair and rinse off after 8–12 hours. Do not shampoo for 24-48 hours afterwards. ● Kills lice and lice eggs. ● A second treatment is recommended in 7–9 days if live lice are seen. ● Approved for use in children 6 years or older. ● Strong odor. ● Flammable.
<p>Spinosad topical suspension (0.9%)</p> <p>Brand name product: Natroba</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Prescription needed. ● Apply to dry hair and rinse off after 10 minutes. Do not shampoo for 24-48 hours afterwards. ● Kills lice and lice eggs. ● A second treatment is recommended in 7 days if live lice are seen. ● Approved for use in children 6 months of age and older.
<p>Ivermectin 3-mg tablets</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Prescription needed. ● Use only when other medications have failed. ● A second treatment is recommended in 9-10 days if live lice are seen. ● Can be used at any age, as long as weight is at least 33 pounds. ● Do not use veterinary formulations of ivermectin. ● Approved for use in adults for head lice, and used in children for other infections.

How to Examine for Head Lice

Use bright light to look at:

- 1 Crown of head
- 2 Bangs
- 3 Behind both ears
- 4 Nape of neck

How to inspect

- 1 Place gloves on your hands
- 2 Use fingers to separate hair and create a part. The part should allow you to clearly see the person's scalp.
- 3 Look for lice crawling on the scalp where the hair is parted or on the hair shaft. The lice will be dark in color and the size of a poppyseed.
- 4 Look for nits near hair follicle about $\frac{1}{4}$ inch from scalp. Nits (eggs) will be white or yellowish-brown. Nits are often more easily seen than lice, especially when the person has dark hair.
- 5 Also look behind both ears and near the back of the neck. You may see lice or nits. You may also see bites.

The size of a nit (egg), nymph, and louse relative to a penny



CDC photos

A. Checking hair for lice



CDC photos

B. Nits (lice eggs) on hair



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Chung EK, Boom JA, Datto GA, Matz PS (Eds). *Visual Diagnosis in Pediatrics*. Philadelphia: Lippincott Williams & Wilkins, 2006. Courtesy of Hans B Kersten, MD. Copyright © 2006. In: UpToDate, Post, TW (Ed), UpToDate, Waltham, MA, 2014.

SCREENING TIP: To distinguish between dandruff and nits, try to flick or pull off the white speck. Dandruff is easily pulled off, but nits are not.

Change gloves between each child's examination and wash your hands after all examinations are completed.



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