

HEAD LICE FACT SHEET

What are head lice?

Head lice (or the head louse) are parasitic insects that can be found on the head, eyebrows, and eyelashes of people. Head lice feed on human blood several times a day and live close to the human scalp. Head lice are NOT known to spread disease. Lice move by crawling; they cannot hop or fly.

Nits: Nits are eggs from head lice and are hard to see. They are about the size of a knot of a thread, oval in shape and are usually yellow or white.

Nymphs: When the egg hatches, it releases a nymph. The nit shell then becomes more visible (dull yellow) and remains attached to the hair.

Adults: Adult lice are about the size of a sesame seed, have 6 legs and are tan to grayish-white. Females are usually larger than males. They need to feed on blood several times a day and can live up to 30 days.

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms may include:

- Live and dead lice in hair
- Nits on hair shafts (near the scalp)
- Itchy scalp
- A rash around the neck or ears
- Irritability and sleeplessness

Head lice and nits are mostly found on the scalp, behind the ears, and near the neckline at the back of the head.

How is it spread?

- By direct head to head contact with an already infested person (common)
- By wearing clothes, hats, using combs and brushes, lying on carpets or beds which have been used recently by an infested person (uncommon)

How is it treated?

- Head lice treatment shampoos and cream rinses can be bought at any pharmacy. **Be sure to read ALL directions carefully and follow them precisely.** Talk to a health care provider for more advice.
- **Remove ALL nits on the head.**

Ridding lice from a home

- Wash **ALL** clothing and bedding used in the 2 days **prior** to treatment in hot water for **at least 10 minutes** and dry on **high heat**.
- Soak hair brushes and combs used by an infested person for 1 hour in hot water with lice shampoo.
- Thoroughly vacuum pillows, upholstered furniture, mattresses, carpets, rugs and cloth car seats .

Lice sprays are NOT recommended for ridding lice from a home. They are VERY toxic and unnecessary.

How can it be prevented?

- Avoid head to head contact with infested people.
- Do not share clothing, hats, scarves, or hair accessories.

More information: <https://www.cdc.gov/parasites/lice/head/index.html>

This FACT SHEET is for information only and is not meant to be used for self-diagnosis or as a substitute for consultation with a healthcare provider. For more information call your healthcare provider.

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