



Door County Public Health Department

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HEAD LICE (Pediculosis)

What are head lice?

Head lice are very small (less than 1/8 inch long, about the size of a sesame seed) tan colored insects that live on the hair of the human head. The lice feed on human blood that can cause severe local itching.

Because the insects move rapidly, it is often difficult to identify a case of head lice by finding the live lice. Usually it is easier to confirm presence of head lice by indentifying the eggs, called nits. Nits are tiny, oval shaped, grayish white in color and are firmly cemented to the hair shaft, close to the scalp. Favorite places are at the nape of the neck and above the ears. Unlike dandruff, nits can't be washed off or brushed away. Nits must be pulled off from the strand of hair.



How are head lice spread?

- Lice do not hop or fly. They crawl.
- Lice move quickly & spread easily during direct personal contact with a person who has head lice. This is the most common mode of transmission.
- Lice may also be spread by sharing combs/brushes, hats, & scarves.
- Lice can be spread when there is storage of items in a shared locker, or stacked together at group activities.
- You cannot get head lice from pets, & you cannot spread lice to pets.

Who can get head lice?

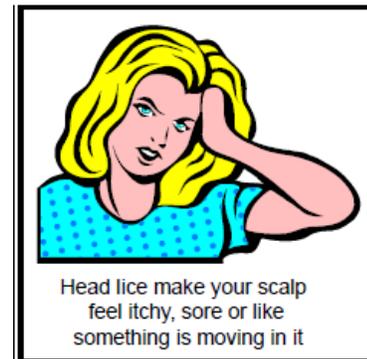
What are the symptoms?

When do symptoms appear?

Anyone, child or adult can get head lice. Head lice are not a sign of poor hygiene and are not responsible for the spread of any disease.

Usually itching is present at the back of the head and around the ears.

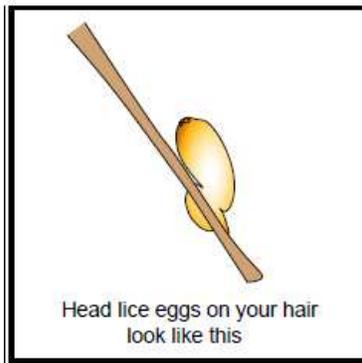
It may take 2-3 weeks for a person to notice the intense itching.



Treatment checklist:

- Never initiate treatment unless head lice have been clearly identified.
- Use one of several head lice treatments available over the counter at your pharmacy. Read directions carefully and **follow the product label exactly.**
- It is very important to remove the nits. All eggs/nits must be removed from the hair to stop the lice cycle. Use a special fine-toothed nit comb to remove nits. Nits may need to be removed by picking them off with your fingertips or cutting off the hair strands they are attached to. Good lighting is important for seeing the nits, the use of a magnifying glass and flash light may be necessary.





- Continue to comb and check daily for 10-14 days until you are sure all lice and nits are gone.
- Check every household member for lice and nits.
- For children under the age of 2, remove lice and nits by hand. If this does not work, check with your child's health care provider for treatment recommendations.



- Children should return to school when initial treatment is complete, and clothing changed or laundered. No more than one day of school should be missed.
- Alternative treatments, such as mayonnaise, olive oil, or petroleum oil may be spread over scalp and hair and left on overnight with a shower cap to smother lice. There is no data as to effectiveness of these treatments.

Stay Lice Free

- Wash all brushes, combs and other hair devices by immersing in hot water (>130 degrees), Lysol, or rubbing alcohol for one hour.
- Clean items that have been in contact with the head of a person with lice in the 48 hours before treatment.
- Floors, rugs, pillows, upholstered furniture (including the car) should be vacuumed thoroughly.
- Clothing and bedding should be washed in hot water or machine dried at the highest setting for at least 20 minutes. Non-washable items should be dry cleaned, or sealed in plastic bags for at least 10 days to destroy lice and eggs.
- Spraying the environment with insecticides is NOT recommended. There is no scientific justification to spray for head lice in the environment. Homes don't get head lice, people do.
- Avoid sharing combs, brushes, hair accessories, hats, head gear, jackets or earphones.
- Do not share pillows, beds, and other personal items.
- If you are contacted and informed that a playmate of your child had head lice, inspect your child's head daily for 2 weeks for evidence of infection.

Remember...

Don't panic...Anyone can get head lice. It is not related to poor hygiene. Head lice are most often passed by head to head contact, and less often by shared objects (combs, towels, etc.). Head lice are no real hazard to health. They carry no diseases, and cannot jump or fly. We will not eradicate them. No one is to blame and there is no need for embarrassment.

Resources:

[Pediculosis Disease Fact Sheet](#), Wisconsin Division of Public Health
[Clinical Report –Head Lice](#), American Academy of Pediatrics, 2010.
 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:
http://www.cdc.gov/parasites/lice/head/gen_info/index.html

