

**YOUR CHILD HAS HEAD LICE
NOW WHAT?**



**A PARENT GUIDE TO THE TREATMENT OF
HEAD LICE**

Your Child Has Head Lice – Now What?

You've been told your child has head lice. First, don't panic.

Every year more than 12 million children are affected by these small pests.

The good news is that lice are not harmful, but they are inconvenient to deal with.

The recommended steps for the management of head lice are:

Learn – Detect – Eliminate – Prevent

Learn



It is important to educate yourself about head lice. Head lice are tiny insects, about the size of a sesame seed. They can be brown, tan, or gray. Head lice hatch from small eggs, called nits that are firmly attached to the hairs on the scalp. Nits can be found throughout the head but are most often behind the ears or the nape of the neck. Eggs hatch in 6-10 days, with new lice reaching adulthood 2-3 weeks later. The female louse lives for 20-30 days and lays about six eggs a day. Lice survive by feeding off blood from the scalp. Lice can survive only 1-2 days off the scalp.

The major symptom of head lice is usually itching, but not always. Persistent scratching of the head and back of the neck should be a cause for concern. Lice do not fly or hop, but they do move very fast, making them hard to spot. Lice are spread only when they crawl from person to person directly, or crawl onto shared items such as combs, pillows, head coverings, clothing, bedding, or towels. Head lice is not a sign of unclean hair. Head lice are found on individuals of any age, sex, ethnicity, and economic background.



Detect

It is important to get in the habit of inspecting your child's hair on a routine basis. Visually inspect your child's head in small sections at a time. Use the pointed end of a comb, part the hair on one side of the head and examine from the scalp to the ends. Check especially behind the ears, the top of the head and the nape of the neck. They are tough to see, so bright lights and a magnifying glass can help. Examining by a window or in the sunlight is also very helpful.

Lice are small grayish-tan wingless insects. Nits are tiny grey oval shaped insects that resemble a grain of rice. Both can be found attached to the hair shaft. Nits are very difficult to remove and often appear glued on to the hair shaft. *If the concerning object falls off the hair easily, it is not head lice.* Nits found within ¼

inch from the scalp usually means the nits are alive and indicate the need for immediate treatment. If lice are found on your child, check others in the household, including yourself, for signs of head lice or nits, and treat accordingly.

If your child does have head lice please inform the school nurse so that the entire classroom can be checked. This will help to minimize the spread of lice in school. Do not send your child to school until he/she has been treated. He/She must be nit free and checked by the school nurse before being cleared to return to school.



Eliminate

The key to treating head lice is to not only treat the child but also the environment.

- Treating the Child -

There are several treatment options for head lice. It is always best to consult with your child's pediatrician. Do not use chemical based treatments in any child under two years of age without medical supervision. There are specific over-the-counter shampoos (RID or NIX) used for the treatment of head lice. Many of these shampoos are insecticides and should be used with caution, especially on children and by pregnant or nursing women. If your child has allergies or asthma please consult with your physician before using these shampoos. ***DO NOT OVER APPLY.*** Please read the package insert, in most cases your child should be retreated in 7-10 days.

Several products on the market offer an alternative treatment to chemicals. These shampoos usually contain herbs, oils or enzymes that are believed to aid in the removal of lice. Other options recommended by local lice experts are the use of olive oil or heavy conditioners that should be left on the head for a minimum of eight hours. Most of these alternative products are designed to suffocate lice. Sometimes lice can be resistant to all treatment options and may require a prescription drug from your doctor, an example would be Ulesfia which is alcohol based.

Once you have shampooed your child's hair you must use a fine-toothed lice comb to remove the eggs. Combs with metal teeth spaced close together work best. Sit behind your child, in good lighting and comb through the wet hair one section at a time. Clean the comb frequently with a paper towel to remove any lice or eggs. Continue to comb and check daily for a minimum of four weeks until no live lice are found. Thereafter, continue to check your child weekly for another three to four weeks, or until no further nits are seen. ***MANUALLY REMOVING NITS IS THE MOST IMPORTANT LICE CONTROL MEASURE.*** It is time consuming but it is crucial for successful treatment. Lice shampoos do not remove the eggs from the hair - ***you must do it!*** Vinegar has also been found to be helpful in removing stubborn nits from the hair shaft after treatment.

- Treating the Environment -

In addition to treating your child, you must also treat the environment. Without treating both you will never get rid of lice.

Vacuum all floors, rugs, carpet squares and upholstered furniture. Remember to also vacuum the rugs and seats of your car and your child's bare mattress.

Linens, bedding, stuffed animals, hats, coats, backpacks and cloth toys used by an infected child two days prior to lice detection should be washed in hot water or machine dried at the highest setting for at least 30 minutes. Disinfect all head gear, head phones or helmets with alcohol or Lysol.

For items that cannot be washed, seal in a plastic bag and store for 14 days at room temperature or 24 hours in below freezing temperatures.

Boil combs, brushes, barrettes in water hotter than 130 degrees. If items cannot be exposed to extreme heat, soak them in Lysol or rubbing alcohol for at least one hour.



Prevent

The most common way to catch head lice is through direct head to head contact. The best way to prevent transmission is to teach your children not to share combs, brushes, hair ornaments, hats, headsets or personal headgear. Do not try on other people's hats, even in department stores.

Teach children to hang coats separately - placing hats/scarves in the sleeve of their coat. Teachers should keep coats separated in the classroom as well. Coats should be placed in backpacks, bagged or kept apart from each other. Do not share hats or helmets. Sleepovers are also a common way lice can be transmitted.

Conduct regular head checks of your child.

Inform the school if your child has lice as well as other parents of children whom have had close contact with your child.

LEARN

DETECT

ELIMINATE

PREVENT

Remember

The key to successful treatment of lice is treating the child and the home. Check all family members for lice. You must manually remove the eggs and check daily. It is a time-consuming process but if you are not thorough the first time, your child will continually be reinfested. Please notify the school so that we can work together to help prevent the spread of lice.

RESOURCES

Mass Department of Public Health

<https://www.mass.gov/service-details/head-lice-pediculosis>

US Center for Disease Control and Prevention

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