

Head Lice Advice (Pediculosis)

Lice are small, wingless, gray or tan insects. Head lice live only on humans but can be transported by pets. Anyone can get head lice, even with good health habits and hair washing. Lice cannot jump or fly; they crawl from one person to another.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF HEAD LICE?

- Gray/tan bugs (the size of a sesame seed) in the hair.
- Nits (white, yellow, tan or brown eggs) attached to hair follicles, usually one-fourth inch from the scalp. Nits will not brush out like flakes of dandruff.
- Itchy scalp.
- Scalp rash.
- May have no symptoms.

HOW LONG BEFORE INFESTATION DEVELOPS?

Eggs (nits) hatch in six to 10 days.

HOW IS IT SPREAD?

It is spread through close contact with infested individuals and sharing combs, brushes, hats and bedding.

WHEN IS THE CHILD MOST CONTAGIOUS?

The child is most contagious when there are live insects on the head.

WHEN CAN THE CHILD RETURN TO SCHOOL?

The child may return to school after treatment, provided crawling lice are gone. Parents should be encouraged to remove nits; however, nits alone should not be a reason for exclusion. Read the product information carefully; some treatments may be inappropriate for infants. If the lice recur, call the doctor to avoid retreating too soon with some medications.

WHAT IS THE TREATMENT?

Treatment for head lice may include:

- Using over-the-counter lice shampoo.
- Combing out nits with a fine-tooth metal comb rubbed with olive oil or beeswax to make it easier to comb the hair.
- Watching children with head lice or nits closely for two weeks for new head lice to hatch. Examine/treat those in close contact for crawling lice or nits.
- Dry cleaning or washing bedding, towels and clothes in hot water, or sealing them in a plastic bag for 10 days.
- Avoiding shared beds, combs and brushes.
- At school, avoiding shared headgear; hanging coats separately; using individual pillow/sleep mats and avoiding common storage containers.
- Vacuuming upholstery, rugs and car interiors. Dispose of vacuum bags immediately, wrap them in plastic bags, seal and throw away.
- Taking additional steps advised by the child's school, pharmacist or doctor for nonpesticide treatment.

Resources: www.cdc.gov, www.nlm.nih.gov, www.kidshhealth.org

This general healthcare information should not be used as a substitute or in place of contacting the child's healthcare provider. Visit www.choa.org for more information.