

Head Lice

Head lice are tiny gray bugs that live in the hair, bite the scalp, and suck blood. They move fast, and are hard to see. They attach their white eggs, called nits, to the hair. Unlike dandruff, these nits cannot be shaken off. The nits are easier to see than the bugs because they are white, and they are a lot of them. The back of the neck is the favorite area for lice and nits.

Head lice can live only on humans. They can spread easily and quickly by using the hat, comb, or brush of an infected person, or simply by close contact with an infected person. Anyone can get lice, no matter how clean or how often the hair is washed.

Treatment for lice includes anti-lice shampoo (which contains Permethrin). Follow the directions on the shampoo, and repeat the anti-lice shampoo in 7 days to prevent re-infection. The next step after shampooing, and a very important one, is to remove the nits from the hair. Remove nits using fine toothed comb, or pull them out individually. The hair does not need to be shaved to cure lice, but if the nits are not removed, your child will remain infected. Removal of nits or lice is time consuming. Your child's room should be vacuumed. Sheets, blankets, pillowcases and clothes worn in the past 3 days should be washed in hot water and dried at the high heat setting of the dryer (lice cannot live for more than 5 minutes to temperatures greater than 128.3°F). Soak combs and brushes in hot water (at least 130°F) for 5–10 minutes. Non-washable items (like hats or coats) can be sealed in a plastic bag for 2 weeks. The CDC advises that head lice do not live long if they fall off a person and cannot feed, so extensive and expensive housecleaning is not necessary, and fumigant sprays are not recommended.

Be sure to check the head of everyone in the household. If lice or nits are seen, they should be treated with anti-lice shampoo as outlined above. Remind your child not to share combs or hats.

WHEN TO CALL:

- If the rash and itching are not gone 1 week after the anti-lice treatment
- If sores start to spread or look infected
- If lice and nits return
- If your child is less than 3 months old



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