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Recognizing and Treating Head Lice: A Guide for Families

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What are head lice?

Head lice are tiny insects (about the size of a sesame seed) that can live on a person's head. They lay eggs on the scalp, and the eggs are attached to the hair. As the hair grows, the eggs move further away from the skin.

Lice commonly live in the hair of children, and can be spread in areas where children are in close contact with others. Anyone can have lice, even people who wash and brush their hair often. While lice are annoying and may be uncomfortable, they are not dangerous.

Lice are usually spread with head-to-head contact. They do not jump or fly. The bugs normally die within 48 hours if they are not on a person.

How do I know if they are gone?

Once the lice are gone, you will no longer see living lice. You will not see new eggs appearing close to the scalp. You may find eggs further down in the hair long after the lice are dead, and the person's head may itch for days after successful treatment. This does not mean you should treat again!

Please remember to follow the medication instructions and retreat as directed.

Can my child go to school?

We recommend that you call or visit the school nurse to inform them of your child's condition. They will be able to advise you on school policies.

Sources:

1. Devore, CD., Schutze, GE. Head Lice. *Pediatrics*. May 2015; 135 (5):1355-65. DOI: 10.1542/peds.2015-0746
2. Head lice. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Web site. <http://www.cdc.gov/parasites/lice/head/> Updated Sept 2013. Accessed Feb 2016.

Image:

1. Live louse. Eran Finkle. <https://www.flickr.com/photos/finklez/3184555590>



**SCRATCHING
YOUR HEAD
OVER
HEAD LICE?**



Am I dealing with lice?

You should suspect head lice in a person who:

- Has been in close contact with someone who has lice
- Has been scratching their head frequently
- Has scratch marks behind their ears or near their hairline

Remember that many people with lice do not have itching. If you suspect lice, examine the head closely.

If you find live lice (pictured above) or find eggs (pictured right) within one finger-width of the scalp, you should treat for lice. The eggs are tiny, often match the color of the hair, and will be firmly attached to a strand of hair. Do not mistake for dandruff, which is easily removed.

If you aren't sure, call your doctor before treating.

What can I do?

Remember that, by the time you discover lice, they have probably been present for several weeks.

Do not panic.

You do not need to scrub everything in your home. Only items that have been in contact with that person's head within the past 48 hours need to be cleaned:

- Vacuum carpets, car seats, and furniture
- Soak hairbrushes in hot water
- You may use the high-heat setting on your washer or dryer to kill lice on clothing, towels, sheets, etc.

The person with lice should be treated as soon as possible, along with anyone who shares a bed with that person.

Medications:

For people over the age of 2 years, there are multiple shampoos or lotions that can be purchased over-the-counter to treat head lice.

- Permethrin (Nix) or Pyrethrin (Rid, etc.)

Use one of the medications listed above, following the package instructions carefully. Do not use conditioner in hair before treating.

If, after 8-12 hours, you see living lice that seem just as active as before treatment, call your doctor. You may need a prescription treatment.

We recommend manually removing eggs within one finger-width of the scalp.

Wet-Combing:

A good option for very young children, and helpful for getting rid of dead lice and eggs that remain in the hair.

Wet the hair with water and conditioner. Then, use a "nit comb" to carefully comb the entire head top to bottom, one small section at a time, at least twice. Comb every 3-4 days for at least 2 weeks after finding any living lice. If you find that the comb is not removing the eggs, you may need to pick them out with your fingers.

Other Options:

Some people support the use of natural products or oils to kill the lice. While some find these helpful, they have not been consistently proven to work. If you are considering an alternative treatment, contact your doctor first.

