

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW Head Lice

Head lice are common and treatable. Prompt treatment, careful combing, and cleaning of personal items can help eliminate lice and prevent them from spreading.

What are head lice?

Head lice are tiny insects that live on the scalp and feed on small amounts of blood. Lice do not spread disease, but they can cause itching and discomfort.

Who is at risk for lice?

Head lice are common, especially among school-aged children and their household members/caretakers. Having lice does not mean a person is dirty or has poor hygiene.

How is lice spread?

Lice spread mainly by direct head-to-head contact and by sharing personal items such as hats, scarves, coats, combs, brushes, or towels.

What are the signs & symptoms?

You may have head lice if you experience:

- Itching of the scalp, neck, or ears
- A tickling feeling or sensation of something moving in your hair
- Red bumps or sores from scratching
- Tiny white or tan eggs (nits) attached to hair near scalp

When to contact a healthcare provider?

Contact a healthcare provider if:

- Lice are still present after completing treatment as directed
- The scalp becomes red, swollen, painful, or develops drainage

What is the treatment for lice?

Treatment for lice is recommended for persons diagnosed with an active infestation. All household members and other close contacts should be checked and those with evidence of an active infestation should be treated. Use an over-the-counter or prescription lice treatment as directed. Follow all instructions on the product label carefully. Use a fine-toothed lice comb to remove lice and nits. Comb wet hair in small sections. Continue checking and combing every few days for 2-3 weeks to ensure all lice and nits are removed. To be most effective, most treatments should be repeated in 9-10 days as directed by the manufacturer.

It's also important to wash clothing, bedding, towels, and hats used within the previous 2 days in HOT water (>130°F) and dry on high heat. Soak combs, brushes, and hair accessories in hot water for 5-10 minutes. If items cannot be washed and dried, seal them in a plastic bag and store them for 2 weeks. Vacuum furniture, carpets, and car seats where the affected person has recently been.

How can I prevent the spread of lice and avoid lice in the future?

- Avoid head-to-head contact
- Do not share personal items that touch the hair
- Examine and treat any household and other close contacts if infestation is found.
- Regularly check hair if lice have been reported at a place recently visited.

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Sources: American Academy of Pediatrics; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention