

Head Lice

FACT SHEET

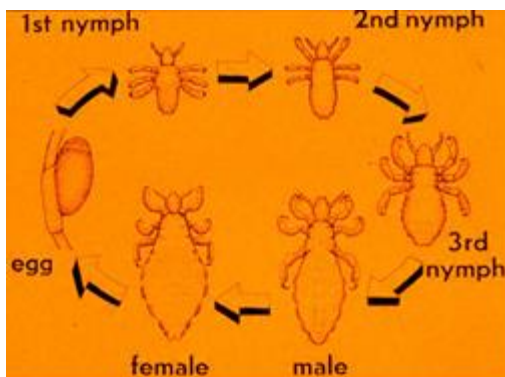


Washtenaw County
Health Department

What is Head Lice?

Head lice are very small blood sucking insects that feed on blood from the scalp. Head lice do not pose a significant health hazard and are not known to spread disease.

Head lice and nits are most commonly found on the scalp, behind the ears and near the neckline at the back of the head. Check the hair and scalp of all family members for lice and nits. It is difficult to see live lice on a head; typically, only nits are seen. Head lice are rarely found on the body, eyelashes, or eyebrows.



The life cycle of the head louse has three stages: egg, nymph, and adult.

(Shown larger than actual size)

Eggs: Nits are head lice eggs. They are hard to see and are often confused for dandruff or hair spray droplets. Nits are laid by the adult female and are cemented at the base of the hair shaft close to the scalp. They are about the size of a knot of thread, oval in shape and usually yellow to white. Nits take about 1 week to hatch. Live eggs are usually located within $\frac{1}{4}$ inch of the scalp.

Nymphs: The egg hatches to release a nymph. The nit shell then becomes a more visible dull yellow and remains attached to the hair shaft. The nymph looks like an adult head louse, but is about the size of a pinhead. Nymphs become adults about 8-12 days after hatching.

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Adults: The adult louse is about the size of a sesame seed, has 6 legs (each with claws), and is tan to grayish-white. In persons with dark hair, the adult louse will appear darker. Females are usually larger than males and can lay up to 8 nits per day. Adult lice need to feed on blood several times daily, and can live up to 30 days on a persons' head. If the louse falls off a person it dies within 2 days.

What are the signs and symptoms?

- Lice in hair (alive or dead)
- Nits on hair shafts
- Itchy scalp
- Tickling sensation
- Trouble sleeping and irritability (lice are more active at night and may disrupt sleep)

How is it spread?

- Direct contact with an already infested person. head to head contact is common among children during play
- Wearing clothes or using combs or brushes that were previously used by an infected person
- Lying on carpets, bedding, or couches previously used by an infected person

This fact sheet is for information only and is not meant to be used for self-diagnosis or as a substitute for consultation with a health care provider. For more information contact your health care provider or visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention at www.cdc.gov.

How is it treated?

Lice may be treated on your own without having to go to the doctor. Head lice treatment shampoos and cream rinses can be purchased at any pharmacy. Ask your doctor or pharmacist for treatment recommendations. Do not apply the lice treatment to a child younger than the age recommended on the product label. Pregnant women and breastfeeding mothers should check with their healthcare provider before treating themselves or others.

General treatment guidelines:

- Apply the shampoo or cream rinse treatment following the product instructions.
- Use fine-toothed lice comb to manually remove lice and nits.
- Combing can be repeated daily until no lice are seen.
- Continue to look for lice or nits for 2-3 weeks.
- A second treatment may be needed in 7-10 days. Follow the product instructions.
- One week after the second treatment do a final check to see if there are any new nits close to the scalp.
- Head lice treatment centers are also an option.

Ridding lice from the home:

- Wash all clothing and bedding used in the 2 days prior to treatment in hot water for at least 10 minutes, and dry on high heat in a dryer for at least 30 minutes.
- Options for clothing and other articles that cannot be washed: dry-cleaning, putting articles in the dryer on high for 30 minutes, or putting them in a tightly sealed bag for 14 days at room temperature or for 24 hours at below freezing temperatures.
- Combs, brushes, curlers and hair ornaments should be soaked for one hour in water hotter than 130 degrees Fahrenheit for 5-10 minutes.
- Pillows, upholstered furniture, mattresses, carpets, rugs, and cloth car seats should be vacuumed thoroughly.
- Lice sprays are not recommended. They are very toxic and not necessary.

How is it prevented?

You can prevent head lice by avoiding contact with objects or people that may be infested. Do not use other people's hats, combs, brushes, or hair accessories.

For more information on head lice visit:

http://www.michigan.gov/documents/Final_Michigan_Head_Lice_Manual_106828_7.pdf

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