



Head louse. D. Barchana, bugwood.org

Louse Treatments

Most home remedies for head lice are ineffective; some are dangerous. Daily combing with a nit comb to remove nits and adult lice can be very effective if done correctly, but may not be sufficient as a stand-alone solution. Over-the-counter products containing pyrethrins or permethrin may provide control of ADULT LICE ONLY. Because nits are not affected, these products usually require multiple treatments to be effective. **Daily nit combing must be used in combination with these treatments.**

Other products are available only with a doctor's prescription. These include benzyl alcohol (Ulesfia™), spinosad (Natroba™), and ivermectin (Sklice™). These are reported to be very effective; however, cost may be an issue. Nit combing is also recommended when using these products.

CAREFULLY READ AND FOLLOW ALL LABEL INSTRUCTIONS WHEN USING LICE TREATMENT PRODUCTS.

Head lice are very specialized insects that only live on humans. While head lice do not transmit disease, infestations can cause itching, irritation, and embarrassment. Scratching can lead to secondary infections. Head lice are often found behind the ears and at the nape of the neck, where severe infestations occasionally result in the formation of scabby crusts where lice may congregate.

Head lice require blood to survive and reproduce. After feeding, a female louse lays her eggs (nits), at the base of the hair shaft, cementing them securely in place. Because nits are resistant to many treatment strategies, nit removal and/or multiple treatments are usually required for effective control of an infestation. The nits typically hatch into nymphs in 7-11 days. They go through three immature stages before developing into an adult. Female head lice lay an average of six to 10 eggs per day and up to 300 eggs in their lifetime. The complete life cycle averages three weeks.

Adult head lice are wingless, six-legged insects about the size of a sesame seed. Their color ranges from tan to gray. They have specially modified claws that enable them to grasp hair shafts, while they feed through needle-like mouthparts.

Head lice can crawl relatively quickly, but they cannot fly, hop, or jump. The only way someone can become infested with head lice is by direct contact with an infested object or person. Lice typically move between hosts by person-to-person contact and by sharing objects such as combs, brushes, headphones, and hats. School-age children are at higher risk because they are more likely to share such items. Head lice are equal-opportunity pests—they do not choose their human hosts by income level or degree of cleanliness.

LICE PROBLEMS IN THE CLASSROOM: PREVENTION AND MANAGEMENT TIPS

1. Provide separate storage areas for students to store personal belongings (hats, coats, scarves, etc.). Sealable plastic bags can also be provided for storing personal items.
2. Discourage sharing of personal items (combs, headphones, hats, etc.).
3. Clean shared classroom items (dress-up costumes, pillows, nap mats, etc.) regularly.
4. Vacuum carpets, upholstery, and areas where clothing and personal belongings are stored.
5. If head lice are found, monitor students regularly for infestations. Head checks should be performed in a well-lit area by trained personnel. Use a clean lice comb for each student.
6. If head lice are found, notify parents and encourage nightly home head checks and combing using a nit comb for at least 12 days. Lice control products should only be recommended as a last resort.
7. Use of pesticides in the classroom is neither necessary nor effective for managing head lice.

Many schools have a “no-nit” policy; however, the presence of nits does not mean there is an active infestation. Also, any nits found further than ¼ inch from the scalp are typically already hatched or dead. It is not necessary to limit student attendance based on the presence of nits alone.

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

Perform weekly head checks in a well-lit area, using a metal lice comb to part and comb the hair. Inspect the scalp (especially at the nape of the neck and behind and around the ears) for crawling tan insects or tiny eggs cemented to hair shafts. It is easy to mistake dandruff, hair product residue, and other debris for head lice, so look carefully. Remember, head lice DO NOT jump, hop, or fly.

MANAGING LICE ON AN INFESTED PERSON

1. Do daily head checks until the infestation is gone; follow up with weekly head checks to detect any re-infestation.
2. Daily nit removal (combing) is crucial, even if other treatments are used. The most effective nit combs are made of metal and are specially designed for removing head lice and their eggs. Combing out nits is easier and more successful when the hair is wet.
3. Use of an effective head louse treatment may be necessary, but should never be done unless LIVE, ACTIVE lice are detected on the head. Treat all infested members of a group concurrently, since individuals may be re-infested by a friend or family member who is not treated.

MANAGING LICE IN THE HOME

1. DO NOT USE bug “bombs” or insecticides in the home in an attempt to control head lice. Lice live on people, not on furniture, floors, or pets.
2. Clean bedding and clothing used by the infested individual. Wash items in hot water (at least 140° F) and place them in the dryer for at least 30 minutes on high heat.
3. Non-washable items can be dry-cleaned or placed in a plastic bag in a freezer. If items are held at 5° F or lower, all lice and eggs should be killed within 10 hours.
4. Clean washable hair care items such as combs and brushes in warm, soapy water and soak in hot water (140° F) for 10 minutes. Do not wash hair dryers, curling irons, etc.
5. Vacuuming carpets and upholstery will remove fallen hairs that may carry nits.

RESOURCES

CDC Head Lice information:

www.cdc.gov/parasites/lice/head/



FOR MORE INFORMATION

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