



COMPASSION SERVICES

Head Lice

Head lice are a common problem that usually affects school-aged children and their families. They can attach to the hair of anyone's head. It doesn't matter if the hair is clean or dirty. Head lice are also found worldwide in all different places, such as in homes or schools or the country or city. And it doesn't matter how clean, dirty, rich, or poor the place or person is.

What are head lice?

Head lice are tiny bugs about the size of a sesame seed (2–3 mm long). Their bodies are usually pale and gray, but their color may vary. One of these tiny bugs is called a louse.

Head lice feed on small amounts of blood from the scalp. They can usually live 1 to 2 days without blood meal.

Lice lay and attach their eggs to hair close to the scalp. The eggs and their shell casings are called nits. They are oval and about the size of a knot in thread (0.8 mm long and 0.3 mm wide) and usually yellow to white. Some nits may blend in with some people's hair color, making them hard to see, and are often confused for dandruff or hair spray droplets. Nits attach to the hair with a sticky substance that holds them firmly in place. After the eggs hatch, the empty nits stay on the hair shaft.

What is the life cycle of head lice?

Head lice live about 28 days. They develop in 3 phases: egg (also called a nit), nymph, and adult louse.

- **Egg or nit.** Eggs or nits hatch in 6 to 9 days. Eggs are usually found within 4 to 6 mm of the scalp and do not survive if they are farther away.
- **Nymph.** The nymph looks like an adult head louse but is much smaller (about the size of a pinhead [1.5 mm]). Nymphs become adults about 7 days after hatching.
- **Adult louse.** An adult louse can multiply fast and lay up to 10 eggs a day. It takes only about 12 to 14 days for newly hatched eggs to reach adulthood.

This cycle can repeat itself every 3 weeks if head lice are left untreated.

How common are head lice?

Head lice are most common in preschool- and elementary school-aged children. Each year millions of school-aged children in the United States get head lice. However, anyone can get head lice. Head lice are found worldwide.



How do head lice spread?

Head lice are crawling insects. They cannot jump, hop, or fly. The main way head lice spread is from close, prolonged head-to-head contact. There is a very small chance that head lice will spread by sharing items such as combs, brushes, and hats.

What are symptoms of head lice?

Itching on the areas where head lice are present is the most common symptom. However, it may take up to 4 to 6 weeks after lice get on the scalp before the scalp becomes sensitive to the lice saliva and begins to itch. Most of the itching happens behind the ears or at the back of the neck. Also, itching caused by head lice can last for weeks, even after the lice are gone.

How do you check for head lice?

Regular checks for head lice are a good way to spot head lice before they have time to multiply and infest (are present in large numbers) your child's head.

- Seat your child in a brightly lit room.
- Part the hair.
- Look for crawling lice and for nits on your child's scalp a section at a time.
- Live lice are hard to find. They avoid light and move quickly.
- Nits will look like small white or yellow-brown specks and be firmly attached to the hair near the scalp. The easiest place to find them is at the hairline at the back of the neck or behind the ears. Nits can be confused with many other things such as dandruff, dirt particles, or hair spray droplets. The way to tell the difference is that nits are firmly attached to hair, while dandruff, dirt, or other particles are not.
- Use a fine-tooth comb to help you search the scalp section by section.

What else do I need to know about treating head lice?

- You may want to wash your child's clothes, towels, hats, and bed linens in hot water and dry on high heat if they were used within 2 days before head lice were found and treated. You do not need to throw these items away. Items that cannot be washed may be dry cleaned or sealed in a plastic bag for 2 weeks.
- Do not spray pesticides in your home. They can expose your family to dangerous chemicals and are not needed when you treat your child's scalp and hair properly.
- All household members and close contacts should also be checked and treated if necessary.

Source: <https://www.healthychildren.org/English/health-issues/conditions/from-insects-animals/Pages/Signs-of-Lice.aspx>