

Head Lice



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Head lice are blood-sucking external parasites found only on people. Their most common victims are school children between the ages of 3 and 10. White children are affected more often than black, and girls more often than boys. Head lice are not necessarily a sign of poverty or poor hygiene. It is estimated that about 10 percent of school children have head lice each year.

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Identification

Head lice, *Pediculus humanus capitis*, are wingless insects with stout, well-developed legs. Each leg ends in a claw used to hold on to the hair. Adult lice are gray or dirty white and 3/16-inch long. The drop-shaped eggs or “nits” are gray or tan and less than a millimeter long. Since adult lice can be hard to see, an infestation of head lice is usually confirmed by the presence of the nits.

Biology and Habits

As they lay eggs, the female lice firmly cement each one to the hair shaft. The eggs hatch in six to ten days. Each female is able to lay about 100 eggs. The entire life cycle from egg to adult requires two to three weeks.

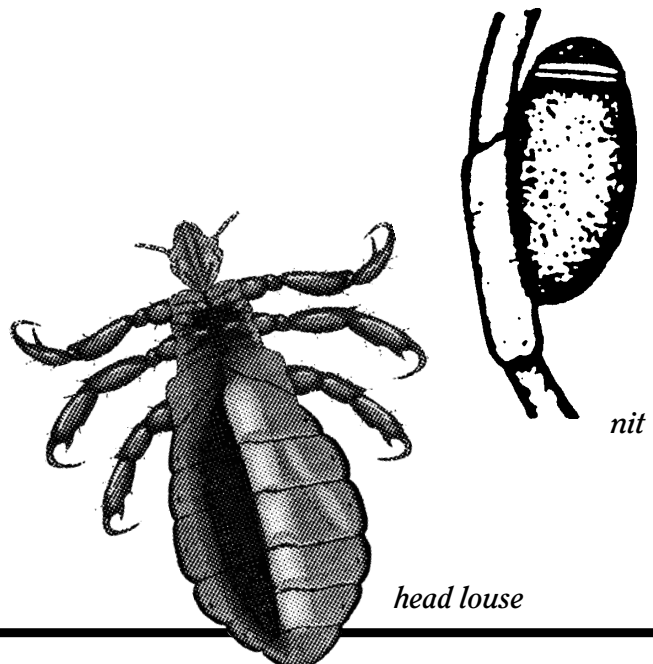
Head lice spend their entire lives on people’s heads. Their bites cause an irritation and sometimes an allergic reaction. The first sign of head lice is scratching of the head, particularly around the back of the head and behind the ears.

Head lice can neither fly nor jump. They are spread by contact between people and through the sharing of such items as brushes, combs, and hats.

Each child should be provided with an individual locker or a separate storage bin for hats, scarves, and coats.

Prevention Methods

The best prevention method for head lice is regular shampooing and combing of the hair with a fine-toothed comb. Head lice shampoos containing insecticides should never be used as a preventive measure. School children should be instructed not to share combs, brushes, or hats. Each child should be provided with an individual locker or a separate storage bin for hats, scarves, and coats.



Control Strategies

If you or a member of your family is affected by head lice, the first control tactic should be to comb the hair with a fine-toothed metal comb specially designed to remove the nits. Any hair removed should be flushed down the commode.

Only those persons with head lice should be treated—it is not necessary to treat the entire family.

Follow combing with a less toxic insecticide labeled for head lice control. One commonly used product is a shampoo containing pyrethrins. Apply the shampoo undiluted and allow it to remain on the scalp for 10 minutes. Rinse the hair with warm water, wash with ordinary shampoo, rinse and dry. Be careful to avoid contact with the eyes. If you are shampooing someone else, be sure to wear rubber gloves. Never use the shampoo more often than the label directs or apply it to broken skin. Repeat the shampoo treatment after 10 days to control any lice that hatch from eggs

not killed during the first application. Only those persons with head lice should be treated—it is not necessary to treat the entire family.

Follow the shampoo treatment by washing or dry-cleaning the affected person's clothing and head wear. Clothes should be washed in hot water and dried in an automatic dryer on the high heat setting. Wash combs and brushes in the lice-killing shampoo, followed by a wash in hot soapy water and rinsing. Vacuum floors and furniture to remove any stray hairs that could have nits attached.

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Since head lice do not survive long off of someone's head, treatment of the house, its furnishings, or school premises with an insecticide is not required.

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