

Head Lice

“Head lice.” Just saying the words makes our head itch. Don’t panic. Knowledge is the best weapon.

What are head lice?

Head lice are tiny insects about the size of a sesame seed that live on the heads of humans. Having head lice is very common, especially for children ages 3 years to 12 years. Having head lice does not mean that you or your child are unclean or dirty. Lice will live on anyone.

Do head lice cause harm?

Head lice are a nuisance, but they are not dangerous and don’t transmit disease. Head lice feed on the blood of the scalp and their bites cause itchiness. Excessive scratching may cause sores and lead to infection.

Are head lice contagious?

Head lice are spread person to person usually from direct head to head contact.

- Less common ways to get head lice include:
 - sharing personal items such as clothing, hats, combs and brushes
 - lying on a bed, couch, carpet, pillow, recently in contact with an infested person
 - head lice only affect humans, and cannot be caught from animals

How are head lice treated?

- **Shampoo the hair:**
 - Use a special shampoo formulated to kill lice.
 - Ask your school nurse, health-care provider, or pharmacist which product is best for your child.
 - Follow all directions on the bottle.
- **Remove all nits:**
 - Have your child sit under a bright light and comb all lice and nits from the hair with a fine toothed nit comb.
 - Remove remaining nits with your fingers.

The best way to get rid of lice is to:

- Check and comb hair every 2-3 days to remove any remaining nits and lice.
Continue to check and comb for 2-3 weeks to be sure lice and nits are gone.

- **Treat the house:**
 - Machine wash clothing and bedding used in the last 2 days, using hot water (130° F.) and the hot air dry cycle.
 - Wash combs and brushes in hot water and soap.
 - Put clothing and stuffed animals that can’t be washed in airtight bags for 2 weeks.
 - Vacuum the places where your child usually sits or rests their head.

Can lice be prevented?

You can help prevent lice by teaching your child to:

- Avoid head to head contact during play at school and at home (on the playground, sports activities, slumber parties, camp).
- Not share clothing, towels, or personal care items such as combs, brushes, or hair ties.

Tips for Parents

- Periodically check your entire family’s hair for lice and eggs
- Watch for signs of itching and sores on children’s scalps or around their ears.

Contact your school nurse for further information.