

# HEAD LICE: Just the Facts

## What Are Head Lice?

Head lice are insects that live on the human scalp and feed on blood. While feeding, lice inject saliva into the skin, which causes itching. An adult head louse lives from 16-30 days. Head lice don't usually spread disease.

## Who Gets Head Lice, and How?

Anyone can get head lice. Children are particularly susceptible due to their close contact in play with others. It has nothing to do with cleanliness and does not reflect poorly on you as a parent. A person with head lice is more likely to give them to family members and people with whom they spend a lot of time or share objects (combs, hats, clothing, etc.).

## What Are The Signs Of Head Lice?

If your child scratches his/her head often or if you hear that people close to you or your children have head lice, check your child's hair for:

- Louse eggs (nits) on the hair (most common indication). These look like tiny oval objects (smaller than the head of a pin) cemented to the side of the hair shafts.
- Lice and nits among the hair. Look for them near the scalp where the hair is thickest, usually behind the ears and around the nape of the neck. Lice avoid the light and will scurry away when hair is parted.
- Fecal specks on the collar. Specks are more likely to be seen if the hair is long, the collar light-colored, and there is heavy infestation.

## Hair Casts And Hair Spray Have Nothing To Do With Head Lice!

Hair casts (material from the hair follicles) may be mistaken for nits. Both may be on the hair at the same time. A hair cast looks like a small collar and slides easily along the hair shaft. Hair spray may resemble dandruff.

## How To Control Head Lice

If you think your child has head lice, see a doctor or pharmacist.

A doctor may prescribe a pediculicide (medicine that kills lice), or you may buy an over-the-counter (non-prescription) one. There are many different pediculicides available.

- Carefully follow the directions on the label.
- Remove the nits with a specially made fine-toothed comb.

## Effectiveness Of Pediculicide

No pediculicide is 100% effective. Remove all nits after treatment. Additional treatments may be required to ensure nits are eliminated. Follow written shampoo directions.

In most cases, ordinary household cleaning and vacuuming will remove nits and lice that may have fallen on rugs and furniture. Lice sprays are considered necessary only when the person has a heavy infestation and household items are difficult to clean or vacuum, such as upholstered furniture with deep folds. **Do not use these sprays on people!**

## Sign Of A Successful Treatment

No lice and no new nits will be laid.

## How To Control Head Lice on Clothing, Bed Linens, And Furniture

"Spring Clean" home and car. Vacuum with disposable bag. Secure bag with rubber band and discard. If allowed to sit, lice will crawl out. Head lice need the warmth, food, and moisture that a person's scalp provides. Away from people, lice will die. To prevent re-infestation, after treatment:

- Wash bed linens and washable clothing in hot water (140°F for 20 minutes).
- Heat dry clothing or other fabric items in a clothes dryer (hot cycle--155°F for 20 minutes).
- Dry clean clothing that cannot be washed or store it for 30 days in a sealed plastic bag (pillows, stuffed toys, etc.).
- **Use only insecticides approved for use against lice.**

## Ways To Prevent The Spread Of Head Lice

- Don't use personal items belonging to others (combs, hair brushes, towels, hats, clothing, etc.). Soak combs, brushes, and hair ornaments (barrettes, etc.) of persons with lice in rubbing alcohol for 24 hours or in hot water (at least 130°F) for 5-10 minutes.
- Avoid hanging hats and coats on the same hooks with others' clothing.
- Keep long hair styled up if possible.
- Learn to recognize signs of head lice and check for them if a child or other family members scratches the head often.
- Treat immediately when head lice are found.
- Communicate with your child's school and friends immediately.

## When Children Can Return To School

PUSD asks that children with head lice be treated immediately, nits removed, and promptly returned to school. Maintaining a "nit free" policy seems to be the best way to keep lice from spreading. Take time to remove all nits and be sure your child received a clearance from the Health Attendant when returning to class.

## Clearing Up Some Common Myths About Head Lice

- Being clean won't prevent head lice. Anyone can get them.
- Head lice can't jump or fly.
- Head lice come from another person, **not** from dogs, cats, or other pets.