

Head Lice

1. What is head lice?

Head lice are small insects that live on a person's head. They usually live close to the scalp and feed off of blood. They are mostly found behind the ears and near the neckline. Lice are very common in children. They can be annoying, but they don't spread disease.

Head lice go through three life stages:

- **Nit** (egg): Attached to hairs, they are often taken for dandruff.
- **Nymph** (baby): Rarely seen due to their small size, they mature into adults in about 9 to 12 days.
- **Adult**: About the size of a sesame seed. If not on a scalp and unable to feed, they die within 2 days.

2. How does head lice spread?

Head lice mostly spread through head-to-head contact with another person that has lice. Sometimes it can spread by sharing items like clothing (hats, scarfs) or brushes and combs that touch hair. Head lice cannot jump or fly from person to person.

3. What are the signs of head lice?

- A tickling feeling of something moving in the hair and itching
- Lack of sleep as head lice are most active during night.
- Scratching can sometimes cause sores. If this occurs, it is important to call your doctor.

4. How is head lice treated?

Over the counter shampoo can kill most lice (brand name: Nix®). It's important to follow the instructions carefully and repeat treatment after 7-10 days. During that time, remove nits by combing daily with a special metal comb made for nit removal. Some lice are drug-resistant and cannot be treated with over-the-counter products. These lice (also called "super lice") are not more dangerous, but may need a prescription from a doctor. Home treatments (mayonnaise or oils) don't work to kill or remove lice. Never coat your child's hair with dangerous products like gasoline or kerosene, or use products that are used for animals. Vacuum the household and clean items that came into contact with an infested person's head (clothing and hair items). Items that cannot be washed should be kept in sealed plastic bags for 2 weeks.

5. How can you prevent getting head lice?

- Check for lice on a regular basis
- Teach children to avoid head-to-head contact and sharing items that touch hair (hats, brushes, combs).



Key Points:

- Head lice are small insects that tend to live near scalps and are very common among children.
- Head lice do not spread disease and cannot jump or fly.
- Most lice can be treated with over-the-counter products, but some might need a doctor's prescription.
- Check children for lice regularly and teach them to avoid head-to-head contact and sharing items that touch hair (hats, brushes, combs).

For more information:

**Los Angeles County,
Department of Public Health**
<http://publichealth.lacounty.gov/>

**California Department of
Public Health**
www.cdph.ca.gov/healthinfo

**Centers for Disease Control
and Prevention (CDC)**
www.cdc.gov/diseasesconditions

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