

Head Lice



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What are Head Lice?

- Insects that live and breed on your head
- They feed by biting your scalp
- They are a nuisance - not a health hazard
- 6-12 million people worldwide get head lice each year

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Who can get Head Lice?

- Anyone who comes in close head-to-head contact with someone who has head lice
- Head lice are found more often among children ages 3-10 years and their families



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Signs of Head Lice



- Tickling feeling of something moving in the hair
- Itching, caused by an allergic reaction to the bites
- Irritability
- Sores on the head caused by scratching (These can sometimes become infected)

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How do you get Head Lice?

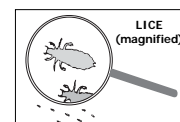
- Close contact with someone who has head lice (heads touching during play/sports)
 - **head lice do not fly or jump but crawl really quickly**
- Sharing of hats, scarves, combs, hair ribbons, pillows, brushes, towels and helmets



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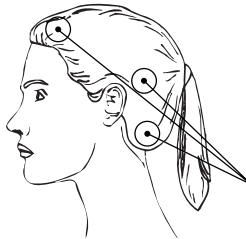
What do they look like?

- Tiny, wingless insects that move quickly and are difficult to see
- 1-2 mm long and grayish brown in color
- Nits (eggs) can sometimes be mistaken for dandruff



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Common sites where Head Lice are found



Commonly found around ears, forehead and nape of neck. Lie close to scalp.

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Life cycle of Head Lice

Life Cycle consists of three stages:

- **Nits** (eggs)
 - | oval, usually white in color, may be mistaken for dandruff, are firmly attached to a hair shaft, close to the scalp
 - | take about 1 week to hatch into nymphs
- **Nymph** (baby louse)
 - | lives on scalp and feeds off human blood
 - | matures in 1 week into an adult louse
 - | if a nymph falls off a person it usually survives only one day

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Life cycle of Head Lice (continued)

■ **Adult Louse**

- | size of a sesame seed, has 6 legs, and is tan to grayish-white
- | females lay nits - they are usually larger than males
- | can live up to 30 days on a person's head
- | feeds on human blood
- | if a louse falls off a person, it may survive one to two days

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Head Lice treatments



■ Talk to your doctor:

- | if you are pregnant or breastfeeding
- | before treating children under the age of two
- | if a person has a seizure disorder
- | if the skin of the scalp has an infection

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Treatments (continued)



- There are many products available at your pharmacy (talk to your pharmacist)
 - | Buy a head lice shampoo or cream rinse from your drug store.
 - | Apply as instructed. Misuse and overuse could be hazardous.
 - | The products kill the head lice and many eggs, but a **second treatment is needed 7 to 10 days after the first treatment to kill any newly hatched lice before they mature.**
- **Remove all nits by using fingernails or a nit comb**

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Treatments (continued)



- It is suggested that you limit shampoo use between the two treatments and in the week following the second treatment. This may allow the head lice product to work more effectively.
- Check head for live lice daily between treatments and remove any nits that are still present (do this in bright light)
 - | head lice and nits are commonly found around ears, forehead and nape of neck - check these areas carefully
 - | if live lice are found in the days following the first treatment, consult your pharmacist or (416) 338-7600
- Check all close contacts (i.e. family and friends)

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Treatments (continued)



- **There is conflicting information concerning whether or not all nits should be removed after the application of head lice products**
- **Toronto Public Health recommends the removal of all nits as:**
 - head lice products are not 100% effective
 - removal of nits may minimize the hatching of eggs that were not killed and the spread of young hatched lice to other heads
 - it is easier to notice a new infestation if all nits are removed

Treatments (continued)



If a baby or a woman who is pregnant or breastfeeding has head lice:

- Call your family doctor or Motherisk Program of the Hospital for Sick Children at 416-813-6780 for advice before choosing a head lice treatment product
- If pregnant and treating others, wear plastic or rubber gloves

Alternative treatments

- **At this point in time Toronto Public Health does not recommend the use of alternative treatments (vinegar, petroleum jelly, mineral oil, baby oil, cooking oil, tea tree oil or other alternatives)**
- **This is because their effectiveness has not been scientifically documented**

House cleaning?



- **You must wash in hot, soapy water:**
 - hats, scarves, hairbrushes, combs, hair ribbons, pillowcases, towels, bed linens, machine washable stuffed toys and coats
- **Wash items after the first and second treatment**
- Items that cannot be machine washed should be dry cleaned or placed in an airtight bag for 10 days to two weeks
- **Excessive house cleaning is not necessary, but vacuum surfaces where heads have rested (i.e. sofas, seats of cars, sports helmets)**
- **NEVER use insecticide sprays**

Controlling the spread



- Discourage head-to-head contact and sharing of hats, scarves, hairbrushes, combs and hair ribbons
- Tie long hair back in braids
- Check heads of all family members and people in close contact

Controlling the spread (continued)



- All family members with head lice should be treated at the same time
- Check young school age children weekly for head lice; more often if there is an outbreak

Controlling the spread (continued)



- If you find lice or nits present on your child's head:
 - Tell all close contacts to check their head
 - **Tell the child's teacher and/or day care worker**

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Important things to remember



- Lack of cleanliness does not cause head lice
- Both children and adults can get it
- Short hair does not prevent the spread
- Lice do not live on cats, dogs or other animals
- You cannot prevent head lice by using head lice shampoos or products - use only if lice are present
- **Be sensitive to your child's feelings!**

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For more information...

- **Please note that the information about head lice varies between sources**

- Some recommended web sites include:

- Toronto Public Health http://www.toronto.ca/health/hl_index.htm
- University of British Columbia www.healthcare.ubc.ca/lice/intro.html
- Harvard School of Public Health www.hsph.harvard.edu/headlice.html
- Canadian Paediatric Society <http://www.caringforkids.cps.ca/whensick/HeadLice.htm>
- American Academy of Pediatrics <http://aappolicy.aappublications.org/cgi/reprint/pediatrics;110/3/638.pdf>

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