

Head Lice Advice



Remove head lice and nits:

- Use a fine-toothed louse or nit comb. These combs may be included within packages of chemical treatment or you may buy one from most drug stores or pet supply stores. Combs with metal teeth spaced close together seem to work best.
- Hair should be cleaned and well-combed or brushed to remove tangles before using a louse comb. Clean the louse comb frequently to remove any caught lice or eggs. Some parents report that water, vegetable oils or hair conditioners help lubricate the hair and ease combing; others report that these make it more difficult to see the eggs.
- Sit behind your child, and use a bright light (and magnification if needed), to inspect and comb through the hair, one small section at a time.
- Repeat combing until no more active lice are observed.
- Comb daily until no live lice are discovered for two weeks. It may take several hours each night for several nights to tackle the problem. An entertaining video may help keep the child occupied during this time.
- Adult female lice cement eggs to the base of a hair shaft near the skin. As the hair grows, eggs are moved away from the scalp. Eggs more than $\frac{1}{4}$ inch from the scalp are nearly always hatched and do not mean live lice are present.
- Combs, brushes, hats and other hair accessories in contact with an infested person should be washed in hot water each day to dislodge any lice or nits.
- Combing is sometimes painful to the child or it may be impractical for other reasons. In these cases, consider using anti-lice products. Speak with the school nurse or your child's doctor for advice.

Over-the-counter treatment:

- Head lice may be treated with shampoos specifically labeled for head lice.
- Read and follow the label directions carefully and specifically. This is very important. Parents should use caution when dealing with any insecticide, particularly on children.
- If the package directions indicate, apply a second treatment 10 days later to kill lice that hatch after the initial treatment.
- Pediculicides do not remove the eggs from the hair.
- You should not treat anyone who does not have live lice (or nits close to the head) and do not use these products as a prevention method to avoid lice.
- Combing can help further reduce the number of live lice and nits on the hair.

Prescription medication:

- In some cases the over-the-counter products fail to eliminate live lice. Your child's physician may then order a prescription for treatment of head lice. As with any treatment product, follow the directions carefully. Ask your physician, the school nurse or the pharmacist if you don't fully understand the directions.

Do not apply any insecticide or other chemical not specifically labeled for treating head lice on people. Well-intentioned parents treating their children with toxic or flammable substances have caused deaths and poisonings.

Alternative treatment:

- Other products such as essential oils, food oil, salts, enzymes, mayonnaise, etc., have not been studied sufficiently to determine their effectiveness.
- Hand-held hair dryers may kill lice and their eggs. Because it is easy to burn the hair and the scalp, this method is not recommended.

Treatment of clothes:

- A clothes dryer set at high heat or a hot pressing iron will kill lice or their eggs on pillowcases, sheets, nightclothes, towels and similar items your child has been in contact with in the past 2 days.

Freezing:

- Lice and their eggs on objects (e.g. toys) may be killed by freezing temperatures. Objects that cannot be put in a clothes dryer may be placed in a freezer (or outdoors if sufficiently cold) for several days. This treatment is rarely required.

Haircuts: Short hair is more readily searched for lice and eggs, but does not prevent your child from getting head lice.

Cleaning house or car:

- Lice off the head usually die within a day and the eggs generally cannot live much longer. Vacuuming the house is recommended, however, a major cleaning effort will do little to eliminate head lice.
- Using insecticide treatments for home, in vehicles, or on carpets and furniture are not needed and unnecessarily expose family members to insecticides.

Please contact me if you have any questions— 691-0323 or aschierman@rsu13.org

Sincerely,

Annabelle Schierman, RN

Source: Harvard School of Public Health, Richard Pollack PhD. www.hsph.harvard.edu/headlice.html
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