

Prevention

- Avoid head-to-head contact during play and other activities at home, school, and elsewhere (sports activities, playground, slumber parties, camp).
- Do **NOT** share clothing such as hats, scarves, coats, sports uniforms, and hair ribbons.
- Do **NOT** share combs, brushes, or towels. Disinfest combs and brushes used by an infested person by soaking them in hot water (at least 130°F) for 5-10 minutes
- Do **NOT** lie on beds, couches, pillows, carpets, or stuffed animals that have recently been in contact with an infested person
- Machine wash and dry clothing, bed linens, and other items that an infested person has worn before treatment using the hot water (130°F) laundry cycle and the high heat drying cycle.
- Clothing and items that are not washable can be dry-cleaned OR sealed in a plastic bag and stored for 2 weeks.
- Vacuum the floor and furniture, particularly where the infested person sat or lay.



References

- The Allegheny County Health Department. (2006). Tips For the treatment and prevention of head lice. Retrieved March 17, 2009, from <http://www.achd.net/pr/pubs/htm/headlice.htm>
- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2008). Head lice. Retrieved March 17, 2009, from <http://www.cdc.gov/lice/head/index.html>
- The Minnesota Department of Health. (2004). Head lice (pediculosis): A treatment guide. Retrieved March 4, 2009, from <http://www.health.state.mn./divs/idepc/diseases/headlice/treatment.pdf>



Created by:

Jackie Church
Kristy DeFrancesco
Jennifer Swick

Community Health Nursing
Students

Head Lice

A General Overview.



Carlow School of Nursing

What are head lice?

Head lice are parasites that can be found on the heads of people. Infection with head lice is called pediculosis (**peh-DIC-you-LO-sis**). Adult head lice are 2.1-3.3 mm in length. Head lice infest the head while laying their eggs at the base of the hair shaft. Lice are able to move by crawling. They are unable to hop or fly.



Actual size of the three lice forms compared to a penny. (CDC Photo)



Adult louse. (CDC Photo)

Who is at risk for head lice?

Head lice are found worldwide. In the United States, infestation with head lice is most common among preschool and elementary school children. Head lice strike people regardless of personal hygiene or socioeconomic status. Young children are at highest risk due to an increased habit of sharing personal grooming items and head gear.

How did my child get head lice?

Head-to-head contact with an already infested person is the most common way to get head lice. Head-to-head contact is common during play at school, at home, and elsewhere (sports activities, playground, slumber parties, camp).

Head lice may also be spread by sharing clothing or belongings onto which lice or nits may have crawled or fallen. Examples include:

- Sharing clothing (hats, scarves, coats, sports uniforms)
- Hair items (hair ribbons, barrettes, combs, brushes, or towels) recently worn or used by an infested person
- Lying on a bed, couch, pillow, stuffed animals or carpet that has recently been in contact with an infested person.

****Dogs, cats, and other pets do not play a role in the spread of human lice****

What should I do if my child has head lice?

You should examine your child's head, especially behind the ears and at the nape of the neck, for nits and lice if your child exhibits symptoms (primarily itching) of a head lice infestation. If nits or lice are found, all household members should be examined for nits and lice every 2-3 days.

If your child has an active lice infestation, you should notify parents of your child's playmates, as well as your child's school or child care facility, so that steps can be made to prevent further spread.

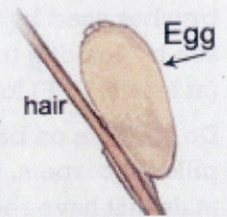


Illustration of egg (nit) on hair shaft. (CDC Photo)

Signs and symptoms of head lice

- Tickling feeling of something moving in the hair.
- Itching, caused by an allergic reaction to the bites of the head louse.
- Irritability and difficulty sleeping, since head lice are most active in the dark
- Sores on the head caused by scratching. These sores can become infected.

Treatment

Over-the-Counter Medications

- **Pyrethrins (Brand names: A-200, Pronto, R&C, Rid, Triple X)**
- **Permethrin lotion 1% (Brand name: Nix)**

Prescription Medications

- **Malathion lotion 0.5% (Brand name: Ovide)**
- **Lindane Shampoo 1% (Brand name: Kwell)**

When using an over-the-counter and prescription medication, always carefully follow the instructions contained in the package or written on the label, unless the physician and pharmacist directs otherwise. If required, a repeat application may be needed in 7-10 days.

"Green" Treatment

The Suffocation Method

1. **Apply the selected suffocant (i.e. mayonnaise, petroleum jelly) generously to the hair, making sure the hair and scalp are saturated.**
2. **Cover the hair with a close-fitting shower cap. Leave the cap on for 8 hours. AVOID treatment while the infested person sleeps, as the cap may become a suffocation hazard).**
3. **Remove the shower cap and wash the hair with shampoo to remove most of the suffocant. Mild degreasing soap (i.e. Dawn, baby oil) may be used to remove greasy oils from suffocant used.**
4. **Remove all nits and any live lice. The infested person's head should be checked regularly for 2 weeks following any head lice infestation.**
5. **Wash hair thoroughly again with shampoo to remove the remaining suffocant.**

Important Information

If you aren't sure which medicine to use or how to use a particular medicine, always ask your physician, pharmacist, or other health care provider.