



CREEPY CRITTERS!

What You Need to Know about Lice

Head lice are parasitic wingless insects. They live on people's heads and feed on their blood (gross!). An adult louse is about the size of a sesame seed. The eggs, called nits, are even smaller; about the size of a knot in thread. Lice and nits are easiest to detect at the neckline and behind the ears.

Head lice are extremely contagious. Close contact or sharing personal belongings, such as hats or hairbrushes, puts people at risk. Children ages 3-11 and their families get head lice most often. Personal hygiene has nothing to do with getting head lice. Head lice do not spread disease.

SYMPTOMS INCLUDE:

- » Tickling feeling in the hair
- » Frequent itching
- » Sores from scratching
- » Irritability and difficulty sleeping. Head lice are most active in the dark.

Treatment for head lice is recommended for people with an active infestation. All household members and other close contacts should be checked. Anyone who has an active infestation should be treated. All infested people and their bedmates should be treated at the same time.

Head lice are spread most commonly by direct head-to-head (hair-to-hair) contact. However, much less frequently they are spread by sharing clothing or belongings onto which lice have crawled or nits attached to shed hairs may have fallen. The risk of getting infested by a louse that has fallen onto a carpet or furniture is very small. Head lice survive less than 1–2 days if they fall off a person and cannot feed; nits cannot hatch and usually die within a week if they are not kept at the same temperature as that found close to the scalp.

PREVENTION

The following are steps that can be taken to help prevent and control the spread of head lice:

- » Avoid head-to-head (hair-to-hair) 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, hair ribbons, or barrettes.
- » Do not share combs, brushes, or towels. Disinfect 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 wore or used during the 2 days 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. However, spending much time and money on housecleaning activities is not necessary to avoid reinfestation by lice or nits that may have fallen off the head or crawled onto furniture or clothing.
- » Do not use fumigant sprays or fogs; they are not necessary to control head lice and can be toxic if inhaled or absorbed through the skin.

To help control a head lice outbreak in a community, school, or camp, children can be taught to avoid activities that may spread head lice.

Treatment for head lice is recommended for persons diagnosed with an active infestation. All household members and other close contacts should be checked; those persons with evidence of an active infestation should be treated. Some experts believe prophylactic treatment is prudent for persons who share the same bed with actively-infested individuals. All infested persons (household members and close contacts) and their bedmates should be treated at the same time.

