

# HEAD LICE

Head lice infestations are a common problem for children in childcare settings and schools.

Anyone can get head lice. There are two other kinds of lice that infest people, but they do not live on the head.

Parents should check their child(ren) for head lice regularly. If they find lice or eggs, use the information and image provided below.

**CAUSE** *Pediculus humanus capitis*, a louse.

Head lice are very small (less than 1/8" long, about this size [--]), brownish-colored insects that live on human heads and lay their eggs (nits) close to the scalp. The eggs are tiny (about the size of the eye of a small needle) and gray or white in color. Adult lice move fast and do not like light.

## SYMPTOMS

- Itching of the head and neck.
- Look for:
  - crawling lice in the hair, usually few in number;
  - eggs (nits) glued to the hair, often found behind the ears and at the back of the neck; and
  - scratch marks on the head or back of the neck at the hairline.

**SPREAD** Lice are spread by head-to-head contact and by sharing personal items such as combs (especially on picture day), sports head gear, brushes, barrettes, hats, scarves, jackets, blankets, sheets, pillowcases, stuffed animals, play activity clothes, and hats. Head lice may be spread during sleepovers.

Lice do not jump or fly; they crawl and can fall off the head. Head lice do not live longer than 48 hours off the head. They only lay their eggs while on the head. Nits which are more than ½" from the scalp are dead or empty and will not hatch. The eggs do not hatch if they fall off the head. Lice do not spread to or from pets.

**INCUBATION** It takes 7 to 10 days from when the eggs are laid until they hatch.

**CONTAGIOUS PERIOD** Until treated with a lice treatment product and are free of all stages of lice in their life cycle.

**EXCLUSION** Childcare: May return when first hair treatment is completed, and no live lice are seen. No exclusion recommended for person for whom live lice have not been observed (e.g., nits only).

School: Follow school district policy for cases in a school setting.

## TREATMENT

- Call a healthcare provider or pharmacist for advice. Recommended treatment includes using either an over the counter (OTC) or prescription medicated (lice

killing) product. Use products that contain permethrin or a pyrethrin-based shampoo.

- Refer to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website (<http://www.cdc.gov/parasites/lice/> then search for “head lice treatment”) for the most current head lice treatment guidelines.
- Follow the product directions carefully (especially the amount of product to use, length of time on the hair, and whether to use on dry or damp hair).
  - Directions will vary, depending on the product used.
- With certain products a second treatment is recommended 7 to 10 days later to kill any lice that may have hatched after the first treatment.
- It may take 24 hours for products to kill lice.
- Lice treatment products are not 100% effective in killing lice, especially nits. Removing the nits (nitpicking) is an essential part of the treatment for controlling the spread of head lice.
- The nits are glued onto the hair shaft as they are laid and require effort to remove. To remove the nits, use a metal nit comb, cat flea comb, or your fingernails to slide eggs off the hair shafts, or use scissors to cut the hair shafts that have nits glued to them.
  - Continue checking the head and combing hair daily for 2 weeks. If all nits within ½" of the scalp are not removed, some may hatch, and the child will be infested again.

***REMEMBER: IT TAKES AT LEAST 2 WEEKS TO GET RID OF LICE.***

- Check all household members for head lice. Treat only household members with head lice and treat all at the same time.
- Many alternatives to OTC or prescription head lice control products have been suggested.
  - Although there is little scientific evidence to support these treatments, people often use alternative treatments when the usual treatments have not worked or when there is concern about the toxicity of repeated use of head lice control products.
- Some of the treatments being used include applying mayonnaise, oils (vegetable, olive, mineral, etc.), or petroleum jelly (Vaseline) to the head. These materials may suffocate and/or make it hard for the lice to move but do not kill the nits. Some of these products are very difficult to remove from the hair.

**PREVENTION/CONTROL**

- DO NOT share combs, brushes, other hair grooming items and other hair accessories (barrettes, etc.), towels, bedding, clothing, hats, and headgear, such as personal headphones and sports helmets.
- Hang coats, jackets, and caps in individual lockers or on assigned coat hooks. If this is not possible, put the clothing in separate plastic bags. Bedding, when not in use for naptime, can be stored in individual plastic bags or storage boxes.

- Parents should check their child's head frequently throughout the year. If one person in a household, childcare, school, etc., has head lice, others should be checked too. Sleepovers are a common setting in which head lice are spread. When a child returns from a sleepover, check the child's head, and launder any bedding that they brought home.
- Clean all combs, brushes, other hair grooming items and accessories (barrettes, etc.) by doing one of the following:
  - soaking in the lice treatment product for 10 minutes.
  - cleaning with hot soapy water.
  - boiling for 5 minutes.
- Vacuum carpets, upholstered furniture, mattresses, and seats in the car(s) thoroughly. Insecticide sprays are NOT recommended because this will expose household members to unnecessary pesticides and most viable lice are found on the head, not in the environment.
- Wash clothing worn in the last 3 days (e.g., jackets, hats, scarves, pajamas), bedding, and towels in hot (130° F or higher) water and dry in a hot dryer for at least 20 minutes before using again. Clothing or backpacks that cannot be washed or dried, linens, and stuffed toys can be dry cleaned or sealed in plastic bags for 2 weeks.

**For more information, please contact your local health department.**

[Carson City Health & Human Services](#) (Carson City, Douglas, Lyon Counties) 775-434-1690 & 775-887-2190 (after hours)

[Central Nevada Health District](#) (Churchill, Mineral, Eureka, Pershing Counties) 775-866-7535

[Northern Nevada Public Health](#) (Washoe County) 775-328-2447 (24 hours)

[Southern Nevada Health District](#) (Clark County) 775-759-1300 (24 hours)

[Division of Public and Behavioral Health](#) (All other Counties) 775-400-0333 (24 hours)

Email: [dpbhepi@health.nv.gov](mailto:dpbhepi@health.nv.gov)