



9910 W Loop 1604 N #124  
San Antonio, TX 78254

Phone (210) 692-0358  
Fax (210) 692-0359

## **Lice (Pediculosis)**

### **“A Lousy Necessity for Kids”**

[www.kidsgrowth.com](http://www.kidsgrowth.com)

A school notice parents hate to receive is one that states "Your child has head lice." This condition, known medically as human pediculosis, is a common and unpleasant reality. Each year over six million American school children are infested, particularly preschoolers who like to share hats and combs as well as play close together.

#### **WHAT ARE LICE?**

Head lice are wingless insects with flattened, elongated bodies about the size of a match head. They have three pairs of legs with large claws that enable them to grip tightly onto the hair. Human lice are very hard to see - they move very quickly and their gray to brown color blends in with the scalp.

#### **CAN HEAD LICE SURVIVE ON PETS?**

No, head lice are human parasites and must feed on us to survive.

#### **WHAT IS THE LIFE CYCLE OF THE HUMAN LOUSE?**

The female head louse lives for about a month during which time she glues four to five eggs ("nits") a day to the hair. She prefers the area above the ears and back of the neck where temperature and humidity conditions are better. The "nits," about the size of a pinhead, hatch in about seven to ten days and the baby lice immediately begin feeding on their host. Within two weeks, the lice mate, produce more eggs, and the cycle begins again. Typically, less than ten live lice are found on an infected person at any one time.

#### **CAN LICE LIVE WITHOUT A HUMAN HOST?**

No. The louse dries out rapidly if they are off a person for more than 24-36 hours.

#### **CAN HEAD LICE HOP OR JUMP?**

The legs of the human louse are adapted for grasping a person's hair so they are unable to hop, jump, fly, or leap tall buildings with a single bound.

#### **DO HEAD LICE SPREAD DISEASES?**

Head lice have little medical consequences except for secondary infection that results when the skin is broken by scratching. The human louse itself does not transmit any disease. The only notable consequence of head lice is the embarrassment experienced by children (and their parents) after being identified as having the parasite.

## HOW IS HEAD LICE TRANSMITTED?

Lice are transmitted by close personal contact with an infested person's head or by sharing articles of clothing and personal items such as hats, batting helmets, headbands, scarves, caps, combs and brushes. Children who become infected in school will carry lice home and may infest family members who then become a source for a recurring louse problem in the home.

## WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF HEAD LICE?

Since lice cause intense itching of the scalp, parents and school officials should watch for children who constantly scratch their heads.

## HOW CAN PARENTS CHECK THEIR CHILD FOR HEAD LICE?

Look for the whitish-to-cream colored eggs glued to hair follicles particularly along the back of the neck and around the ears. To the untrained eye, nits can easily be confused with dandruff or even dried flakes of hair spray. Because infested children usually have fewer than ten live lice, parents can easily miss seeing live lice. A useful way to check for their presence is to have the child hold their head over a light-colored towel or piece of cardboard. Brush the youngster's hair and scalp vigorously toward the towel. Lice that become dislodged will become visible on the towel.

## WHAT SHOULD PARENTS DO IF THEY LEARN THEIR CHILD HAS LICE?

Immediately notify the school nurse and parents of the child's playmates. Do not be embarrassed! Head lice are not a sign of uncleanliness. Other children are also infested, and if the condition goes unchecked, children who were previously treated will become reinfested and have to be treated again. Don't forget to check all family members as well.

## WHAT IS THE TREATMENT FOR HEAD LICE?

Several "over-the-counter" products are available including Nix®, RID®, A200® and R&C Shampoo. Nix® has the added benefit of killing both the live adults and the eggs. One or two additional treatments at 7-10 day intervals are sometimes needed to entirely eliminate the infestation. It is important to follow the directions on the shampoo, and use a freshly cleaned towel when finished with shampooing. Reinfestation of children from an untreated, infested contact is more common than treatment failure following proper application of the shampoo.

## HOW IMPORTANT IS IT TO REMOVE THE NITS?

Mechanical removal of louse eggs with special combs provided with the shampoos helps reduce the number of lice that might hatch. Even if parents use Nix, the nits may remain attached to the hairs, giving the impression of an active infestation. Nit removal is a time-consuming and often frustrating job but youngsters who are declared "nit-free" can return to class sooner. The nits do not come off easily and each must be snagged firmly by fingernails, tweezers, or comb and slide from the scalp to end of the hair shaft. Nits are more easily removed when the hair is still damp after shampooing.

## HOW CAN PARENTS DELOUSE PERSONAL ITEMS?

Washable clothing, hats, head bands, helmets, bed linen, towels, sleeping bags, and other personal items (such as brushes and combs) including those kept in purses and in the car should be washed in hot (120 degrees' F or higher) soapy water for five to ten minutes, then dried in a clothes dryer for at least 20-30 minutes. Woolen or other non-washable clothing can be dry-cleaned, but this additional expense can be avoided by simply isolating the articles for 1-2 days. Vacuuming mattresses, upholstery and carpeting will pick up stray lice. Personal items, stuffed toys, and clothing that cannot be washed at high temperatures or dry cleaned should be placed in an air tight plastic bag for two days. Spraying furniture, carpeting and bedding with an insecticide serves no real purpose.

## WHEN CAN A CHILD WITH HEAD LICE RETURN TO SCHOOL?

The American Academy of Pediatrics states that total nit removal is not necessary for controlling head lice and children should be allowed to return to school the morning after treatment. Some schools, however, still have a "no nit" policy that says that children cannot attend school until they are free of nits.