

# School Health Lice Quick Facts

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## What are head lice?



The head louse, or *Pediculus humanus capitis*, is a parasitic insect that can be found on the head, eyebrows, and eyelashes of people. Head lice feed on human blood several times a day and live close to the human scalp. Head lice are not known to spread disease (CDC, 2020).

## How do head lice spread?

Head lice move by crawling; they cannot hop or fly. Head lice are spread by direct contact with the hair of an infested person. Anyone who comes in head-to-head contact with someone who already has head lice is at greatest risk. Spread by contact with clothing (such as hats, scarves, coats) or other personal items (such as combs, brushes, or towels) used by an infested person is uncommon. Personal hygiene or cleanliness in the home

or school has nothing to do with getting head lice (CDC, 2020).

## How is head lice treated?

- Before applying treatment, it may be helpful to remove clothing that can become wet or stained during treatment.
- Apply lice medicine, also called pediculicide, according to the instructions contained in the box or printed on the label. If the infested person has very long hair (longer than shoulder length), it may be necessary to use a second bottle. Pay special attention to instructions on the label or in the box regarding how long the medication should be left on the hair and how it should be washed out.

\*\*\*After treatment: perform daily head checks daily for nits for at least 10 days to 2 weeks following treatment.

## How do you prevent spread/reinfestation?

- Soak brushes and combs in hot water (130°F) for at least 10 minutes.
- Encourage each family member to have their own comb or brush.
- Machine wash all washable clothing and bed linens that the infested person has worn or slept on during the two days before treatment. Use the hot water (130°) cycle. Dry laundry using high heat for at least 20 minutes. It is important that adequate time be allowed between wash loads to let the water heater achieve the appropriate temperature.
- Articles that cannot be machine washed, such as stuffed animals, pillows or comforters, can be vacuumed, dry cleaned or stored in sealed plastic bags for a period of 10 to 14 days.

## Tips & Tricks

- Do not use a combination shampoo/conditioner, or conditioner before using lice medicine. Do not re-wash the hair for 1–2 days after the lice medicine is removed.
- Have the infested person put on clean clothing after treatment.
- If a few live lice are still found 8–12 hours after treatment, but are moving more slowly than before, do not retreat. The medicine may take longer to kill all the lice. Comb dead and any remaining live lice out of the hair using a fine-toothed nit comb.
- If, after 8–12 hours of treatment, no dead lice are found and lice seem as active as before, the medicine may not be working. Do not retreat until speaking with your health care provider; a different pediculicide may be necessary. If your health care provider recommends a different pediculicide, carefully follow the treatment instructions contained in the box or printed on the label.
- Nit (head lice egg) combs, often found in lice medicine packages, should be used to comb nits and lice from the hair shaft. Many flea combs made for cats and dogs are also effective.
- After each treatment, checking the hair and combing with a nit comb to remove nits and lice every 2–3 days may decrease the chance of self-reinfestation. Continue to check for 2–3 weeks to be sure all lice and nits are gone. Nit removal is not needed when treating with spinosad topical suspension.
- Retreatment is meant to kill any surviving hatched lice before they produce new eggs. For some drugs, retreatment is recommended routinely about a week after the first treatment (7–9 days, depending on the drug) and for others only if crawling lice are seen during this period. Retreatment with lindane shampoo is not recommended (CDC, 2020).

Reference: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2020, September 17). CDC - lice - head lice - general information - frequently asked questions (faqs). Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. [https://www.cdc.gov/parasites/lice/head/gen\\_info/faqs.html](https://www.cdc.gov/parasites/lice/head/gen_info/faqs.html)