

## **HEAD LICE FACT SHEET FOR PARENTS**

Lice are very, very small insects. In fact, they are so tiny that you can barely see them! Each **louse** (the name for one of the lice) is brown and gray and only about the size of a sesame seed.

When lice start living in hair, they also start to lay eggs, or nits. Lice can survive up to 30 days on a person's head and can lay eight eggs a day. Lice attach their nits to pieces of hair, close to the scalp. If you see a small, oval blob on a strand of hair, that's probably a nit. If these little eggs are yellow, tan, or brown, the lice haven't hatched yet. If the eggs are white or clear, the lice have hatched.

### **Who is at risk for getting head lice?**

Anyone who comes in head-to-head contact with someone who already has head lice is at greatest risk. Occasionally, head lice may be acquired from contact with clothing (such as hats, scarves, coats) or other personal items (such as brushes or towels) that belong to an infested person. Preschool and elementary-age children, 3-11, and their families are infested most often. Girls get head lice more often than boys. In the U.S., African-Americans rarely get head lice. Personal hygiene or cleanliness in the home or school has nothing to do with getting head lice.

### **Where are head lice most commonly found?**

They are most commonly found on the scalp, behind the ears and near the neckline at the back of the neck. Head lice hold on to hair. Head lice are rarely found on the body, eyelashes, or eyebrows.

### **What are the signs and symptoms of head lice infestation?**

- Tickling feeling of something moving in the hair.
- Itching, caused by an allergic reaction to the bites.
- Sores on the head caused by scratching (sores sometimes become infected).
- Irritability.

### **How can I treat a head lice infestation?**

The most important step in treating a head lice infestation is to treat the person and other family members with head lice with medication to kill the lice. Wash clothing and bedding worn or used by the infested person in the 2-day period just before treatment is started.

**Treat the infested person:** Requires using an over-the-counter (OTC) or prescription medication. Follow these treatment steps:

1. Before applying treatment, remove all clothing from the waist up.
2. Apply lice medicine, also called pediculicide (peh-DICK-you-luh-side), according to label instructions. If your child has extra long hair (longer than shoulder length), you may need to use a second bottle. Pay special attention to instructions on the bottle regarding how long the medication should be left on and whether rinsing the hair is recommended after treatment.

**WARNING:** *Do not use a cream rinse or combination shampoo/conditioner before using lice medicine. Do not re-wash hair for 1-2 days after treatment.*

3. Have the infested person put on clean clothing after treatment.
4. If a few live lice are still found 8-12 hours after treatment, but are moving more slowly than before, do not retreat. Comb dead and remaining live lice out of the hair. The medicine may take longer to kill lice.
5. 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. See your health care provider for a different medication; follow treatment directions.
6. 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.
7. After treatment, check hair and comb with a nit comb to remove nits and lice every 2-3 days. Continue to check for 2-3 weeks until you are sure all lice and nits are gone.
8. If using OTC pediculicides, retreat in 7-10 days. If using the prescription drug malathion, retreat in 7-10 days ONLY if crawling bugs are found.

**Treat the household:** Head lice do not survive long if they fall off a person and cannot feed. You don't need to spend a lot of time or money on housecleaning activities. Follow these steps to help avoid re-infestation by lice that have recently fallen off the hair or crawled onto clothing or furniture.

1. To kill lice and nits, machine wash all washable clothing and bed linens that the infested person wore or used during the 2 days before treatment. Use the hot water (130°F) cycle. Dry laundry using high heat for at least 20 minutes.
2. Dry clean clothing that is not washable, (coats, hats, scarves, etc.) **OR** Store all clothing, stuffed animals, comforters, etc., that cannot be washed or dry cleaned into a plastic bag; seal for 2 weeks.
3. Soak combs and brushes for 1 hour in rubbing alcohol, Lysol\*, or wash with soap and hot (130°F) water.
4. Vacuum the floor and furniture. The risk of getting re-infested from a louse that has fallen onto a carpet or sofa is very small. Don't spend a lot of time on this. Just vacuum the places where the infested person usually sits or lays. Do not use fumigant sprays; they can be toxic if inhaled or absorbed through the skin.