
Lice Information Handout

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2024

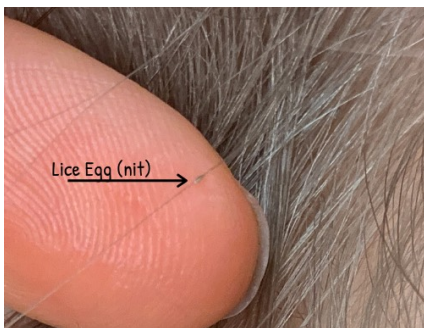
Head lice are very common in school aged children. Lice are not a health risk and they do not spread any diseases. Anyone who has hair can get head lice; there may be few or no symptoms, but an itchy scalp and small red lesions like a rash can occur.

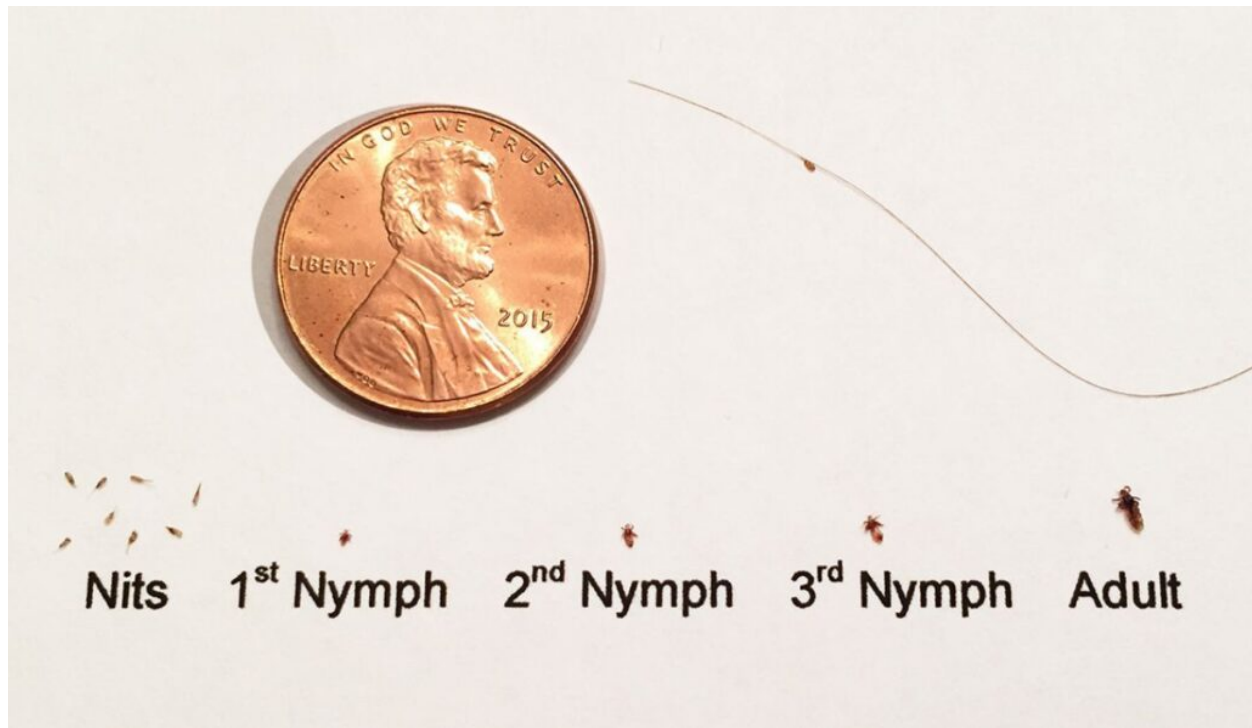
Head lice spread quickly through head-to-head contact by crawling from one hair to another. There is a very small chance of head lice spreading indirectly through sharing hats, combs, hairbrushes, hair accessories, helmets or headphones.

Appearance / What To Look For

Head lice are tiny, greyish brown, wingless insects that live on the scalp, feeding on human blood. They lay eggs, also called nits, which stick to strands of hair very close to the scalp. You can find lice and nits anywhere on the head, however nits are often found behind the ears and on the back of the neck.

Depending on your hair colour and the hatching cycle, nits can appear clear, white, tan, or dark brown and can have a shiny / translucent appearance.





Life Cycle

3 Main Stages:

Nits (eggs) are whitish gray, tan or yellow ovals about the size of a grain of sand. They are found stuck to the hair close to the scalp. Nits hatch in 7 - 10 days, and the empty shell of the nit stays stuck to the hair. Nits do not slide or flake off the hair shaft easily (like dandruff does).

Nymphs are young lice, they look like adult lice but are smaller. It takes the nymphs 9 - 12 days to go through 3 stages of moulting and grow into adult lice before they are able to lay eggs.

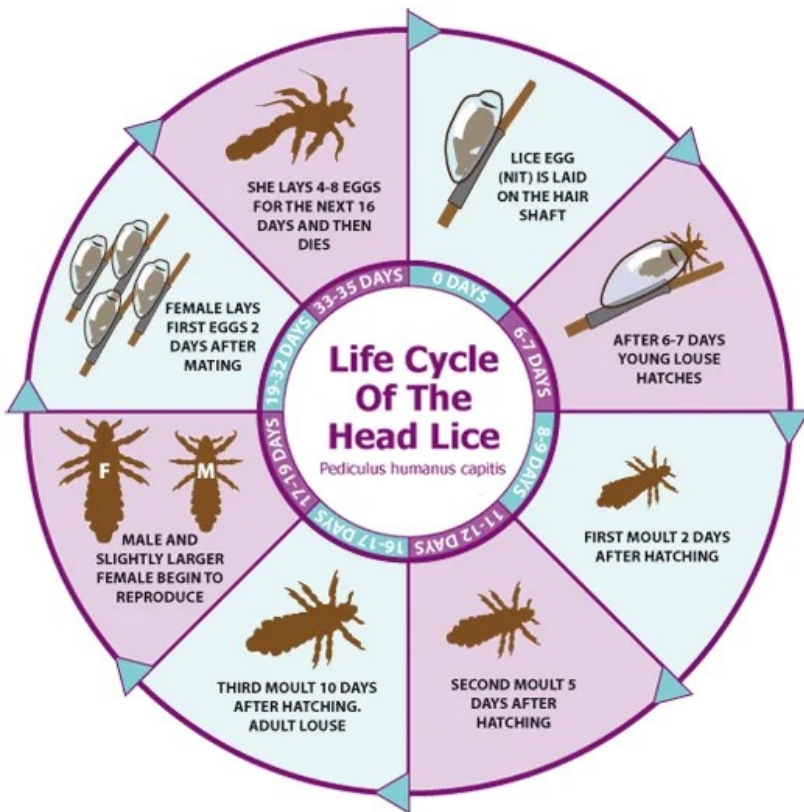
Adult lice are about the size of a sesame seed. They move around on the scalp very quickly and can be difficult to spot. Once a nymph changes to an adult lice it can live on the head for about 20 days, laying 4 - 8 eggs a day.

Lice can be spread as long as live lice and nits are present, total life cycle is approx. 32 - 35 days.

Myths Vs. Facts

* Adult lice cannot live more than 24 - 48 hours off of a human host; nits need to stay warm and usually die within a week if they aren't kept at a consistent temperature near the scalp

* Lice cannot infest environments (ie furniture or carpet), there is no need to deep clean your house or car (but you may consider washing bedding and clothing items in hot soapy water)



- * Lice cannot jump or fly, however they can crawl very quickly on the scalp
- * You cannot suffocate or kill lice using conditioner, plastic wrap or oil products
- * Head lice *do not* live on pets and pets do not play a role in the spread of head lice
- * Lice are *not* more attracted to dirty hair. Personal hygiene levels or levels of cleanliness in the home have nothing to do with getting head lice. In fact, according to the Mayo Clinic, it may be easier for lice to lay eggs on a clean hair shaft rather than one that is more oily

Treatment Options

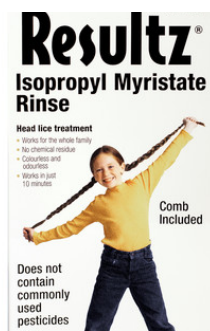
Two options: **Wet Combing Method** or **Lice Shampoo** treatment.

The **wet combing method** is recommended as the most effective way to get rid of lice. There are many step-by-step videos available online. A large amount of conditioner is applied to wet hair (and not rinsed out), which helps slow the adult lice down so they are easier to remove and makes the hair easier to comb through.

Comb sections of hair using a fine toothed lice comb. Divide hair into small sections, then firmly draw the comb from the scalp to the end of the hair. After each stroke, wipe the comb on a paper towel to look for lice and nits (you can also rinse the comb in a bowl of water). Check the comb for lice before you pull it through the hair again to make sure you do not put lice back onto the head. Continue section by section until the entire head is done. Make sure hair stays wet with conditioner during combing.

Combing treatments are done every 3-4 days over a two-week period to remove any live lice and nits. This breaks the life cycle of head lice by removing them before they are fully grown and able to lay more eggs. This option is low cost and safe but takes time - each combing session takes approx. 1/2 hour for each person, depending on length of hair.

There are a few options for **lice shampoo** (chemical) treatment:



Our local pharmacies carry the above options:
Nix \$24.99, Resultz \$29.99 - 49.99, NYDA \$49.99

According to HealthLink BC: Chemical treatment of pregnant or nursing mothers, and of children less than 4 years of age should be given only under the direction of a health care provider. Most products kill live lice but not nits, so treatments need to be repeated in 7 to 10 days to make sure that any nymphs that have hatched after the first treatment are killed before they have a chance to mature and lay eggs. It is also important to check the head for any nits and remove them after the second treatment. NYDA is the only treatment that claims to effectively smother the lice, larvae and eggs.

Insecticides: In Canada, two insecticides are approved to treat head lice: Pyrethrin (found in R&C shampoo) and Permethrin (Nix or Kwellada-P creme rinse).

Pyrethrin and permethrin are safe when used on humans over 2 months old. These treatments can sometimes make the scalp itchy or can leave a mild burning feeling. Over time, head lice have become resistant to some of the chemicals used to kill them so some products may be less effective if used repeatedly on the same case of lice.

Non-Insecticides: Isopropyl myristate/cyclomethicone (Resultz) is approved for use in Canada, but it should only be used in children **4 years of age and older**. A second treatment is recommended after 7 to 10 days.

Silicone oil dimeticone (NYDA) is effective against live lice, nymphs and nits. It should only be used in children **2 years of age and older**. A second treatment is recommended after 7 to 10 days.

Emotional Component

Stigma and shame can exist around having lice. Why can't we get rid of it in schools? Because not every child has access to a caregiver who can devote the time it takes to effectively get rid of head lice. And even if a parent / caregiver is very vigilant, the cycle can continue if only ONE nit is missed during treatment and hatches. In addition, chemical treatments (lice shampoo) and combs can be cost prohibitive.

A child with head lice does not need to be excluded from school or a childcare centre. Encourage the child to avoid head-to-head contact with other children until after their first wet combing or chemical treatment.

It's important to try and be kind and empathetic towards yourself and others - we are all in this parenting journey together! Getting rid of a case of lice can be annoying and time-consuming, but the more we are able to normalize this common irritant the less embarrassed or stigmatized our kids and families will feel.

Prevention Tips & Deterrents

- * **Check everyone in the household weekly!** You can check for nits on dry or wet hair
- * Check earlier in the day (before bedtime) to avoid a late-night treatment session
- * Have a headlamp and magnifying glass and metal lice comb at home
- * Tie long hair back - hair held in place makes it more difficult for lice to latch on
- * Teach kids at an early age not to share anything that goes on your head: hats, helmets, costume items, hoodies, scrunchies etc.
- * Items that cannot be washed (ie hats or helmets) can be put in the freezer for 48 hours or sealed in an air tight plastic bag for 2 weeks to kill any live bugs
- * Tea tree & lavender essential oils may be a deterrent: mix 5 to 8 drops of each oil + 1 Tbsp witch hazel + H₂O into a spray bottle, spray on hair each morning before school concentrating on back of the neck and behind the ears (test first for skin reaction to oils)
- * You can cut nits off of single hair shafts for long hair / sensitive scalps to help lessen combing
- * Put on music, tv, play a word game while you comb
- * Call a friend if you need help checking / treating your own hair, or if you have trouble seeing nits in your child's hair

Reach out to your School, Public Health Nurse or local Pharmacy with questions!

Sources: Island Health, BCCDC, Healthlink BC, Canadian Paediatric Society

OPTION B: WET COMBING A non-chemical way to find and eliminate head lice.

Remove the Head Lice: Wet combing is based on the life cycle of head lice. This removes the live head lice from the head. Combing treatments are done every 3–4 days over a two-week period. This breaks the life cycle of head lice by removing them before they are fully grown and able to lay more eggs. This option is low cost and safe but takes time. Approximate cost for nit comb is \$4, and for conditioner is \$5 per bottle.

STEPS TO FOLLOW

Do	Remember
1. Wash hair with normal shampoo and rinse.	Note: On average, a wet combing session takes about ½ hour per person.
2. Apply at least ½ cup of normal conditioner (any brand) to cover and wet all of the hair. Do not rinse out the conditioner.	Untangle hair with a regular wide tooth comb. Wet conditioner will stop the lice from moving around as quickly.
3. Comb sections of hair using a fine toothed lice comb. Divide hair into small sections. Firmly draw the comb from the scalp to the end of the hair. After each stroke, check the comb for lice. Rinse the comb in a sink or bowl of warm water, and wipe dry. Continue section by section until the entire head is done. Make sure hair stays wet with conditioner during combing.	Metal or plastic nit combs are available at your local pharmacy. If the comb tugs the hair, use a wide toothed comb first and more conditioner, then try the nit comb again.
4. Rinse hair. Leave hair dripping wet. Repeat Step 3 combing without conditioner, until no lice are found.	Check the comb and your fingernails for head lice (you do not want to put any lice back in the hair).
5. Wash clothing worn in the past 2–3 days, bed sheets and pillowcases and place in hot cycle of the dryer or put the items in a sealed plastic bag for 10 days.	There is no reason to do a major clean up of the house to get rid of head lice. Only items that have been in direct contact with the affected person need to be washed, such as shirts, jackets, hats, combs, brushes and pillowcases.
6. Repeat Steps 1–4 every three or four days for two weeks.	Follow the schedule below.

DAYS TO WET COMB	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
	8	9	10	11	12	13	14

* If lice are found on the fourth combing, add one more combing in 3 days.

Source: Vancouver Coastal Health