

If you have questions, contact your local health department or clinic.

Actual size of egg (nit), nymph, and adult head lice compared to a penny



Image Courtesy CDC

A PARENT'S GUIDE TO HEAD LICE



Easy Steps to Control Head Lice

California Department of Public Health
Vector-Borne Disease Section
(916) 552-9730
www.cdph.ca.gov
2019



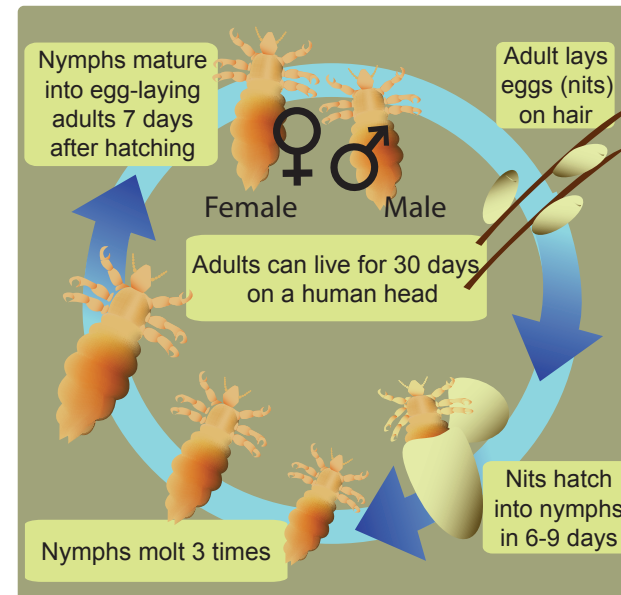
What are head lice?

Head lice are small insects that live in people's hair and feed on their blood. Head lice are common among school-aged children — about 6 to 12 million infestations occur each year in the US.

Lice glue their eggs (also called "nits") to hair. Nits take 6 to 9 days to hatch, and 7 or more days for the lice to become egg-laying adults.

Head lice die quickly (within two days) without feeding, so they cannot live very long away from your child's head.

Development of Head Lice



How do people get head lice?

Children can give head lice to other children from head-to-head contact and sometimes when they share combs, hats, hair clips, clothing, scarves, or other personal items. Head lice are a problem in homes, day care centers, and elementary and preschools.

Children are more likely to get lice from family members and playmates than from classmates at school. **Head lice cannot jump or fly and do not spread diseases.**

How do I know if my child has lice?

If your child has lice, they may complain of a tickling feeling in their hair. Frequent scratching, irritability, and sores on the head from scratching are often common if a child has head lice.

Look through your child's hair to see if they have lice or nits. **Don't confuse dirt or dandruff with nits.** Nits stick on the hair and are usually found near the scalp.

How can I get rid of my child's lice?

Nit combing and removal

If your child has head lice, the best way to get rid of the lice is to comb their hair every day with a nit comb for two weeks.

Nit combs should be metal (not plastic) and have long teeth. Several brands of nit combs are available at your local pharmacy. Metal flea combs found at pet stores may be used as well.



The best way to remove nits is to part the hair into small sections, and comb each section of hair from roots to tip using a nit comb. Keep track of the hair you have combed by pinning it away from the other sections of hair. If lice are found, wipe or rinse the comb before using it again. **It is easier to comb wet hair.**



Any nits that cannot be combed out must be removed. You can do this by picking them out with fingernails or by cutting a single hair between the scalp and where the nits are attached.

Check all family members' hair completely. Common places to find lice are close to the scalp, the neckline, and behind the ears.



Treatments

Permethrin (1%) (Nix[®]) or pyrethrin are the active ingredients in most over-the-counter head lice treatments. These products kill adult lice, but not nits, so a second treatment may be needed if live (crawling) lice are found 9-10 days after treatment.

Malathion lotion (0.5%) (Ovide[®]) can be prescribed to kill live lice and may kill some nits. A second treatment may be needed if live lice are found 7-9 days after treatment. (For use only on children 6 years or older.)

Benzyl alcohol lotion (5%) (Ulesfia[®]) can be prescribed to kill lice on children 6 months and older. A second treatment is usually needed if live lice are found 7 days after the first treatment.

Spinosad (0.9%) (Natroba[®]) and **Ivermectin** (0.5%) (Sklice[®]) can be prescribed to kill lice and nits on children 6 months or older. Repeat treatment is only needed if live lice are found 7 days after the first treatment.

VERY IMPORTANT TREATMENT INFORMATION

- Follow the label directions carefully.
- Only treat people who have head lice.
- Do not leave the product on for a longer time than recommended; it will not kill the lice faster.
- Each person with head lice needs a complete treatment; do not split a single box of shampoo between people.
- Even after treatment, you should remove nits daily with a metal nit comb until all nits are completely removed.
- If a few live lice are found the day after treatment, wait at least 7-10 days before treating someone again if they still have head lice. Some products only kill lice and not nits. During the 7-10 day period, continue to remove any lice and nits found.



What if the treatment did not work?

Here are a few reasons the treatment might not have worked:

- The directions on the treatment product were not followed correctly
- The nits were not completely combed out or removed
- The child got head lice again from a playmate
- Lice may not die right away
- The problem was not lice



In rare cases, lice may be resistant to over-the-counter treatments. If lice are still active 8-12 hours after treatment, do not treat again without speaking with your health care provider first.

There is NO proof that the following products work:

- Vinegar
- Products that say they dissolve the glue on the nits "to ease their removal"
- Mayonnaise
- Olive oil
- Tea tree oil



* Use of this product name does not imply commercial endorsement by the California Department of Public Health.

Here are a few other things you can do to get rid of the lice or nits in your home:

- Wash clothing, bedding, and any other items that came in contact with your child 2 days before treatment in hot water (>130°F), then dry on the hottest heat cycle.



- Place combs, brushes, hair bands, and hair clips in hot water (>130°F) for 5-10 minutes, or soak them in rubbing alcohol or a disinfectant (like Lysol[®]) for one hour.
- Seal items that cannot be washed in plastic bags for 2 weeks to kill lice by preventing them from getting a blood meal.
- Vacuum carpets and furniture in areas where your child sat or laid down.

