

# Quick Guide for Removing Head Lice

This Quick Guide supplements the N.D. Department of Health's Disease Fact Sheet, Head Lice (Pediculosis)



## 1. Check every member of the family.

Lice are hard to see, so look for tiny white to yellow colored eggs (nits) on the hair near the scalp, especially at the nape of the neck and behind the ears.

## 2. Use a product for treating lice.

Numerous products for the treatment of head lice are available without a prescription; talk to your health care provider about treatment products or alternative treatment options.



Remember, no product is 100 percent effective for getting rid of all the lice and eggs (nits). **It is very important that you follow the label directions on the product EXACTLY.**

**Using a head lice treatment product will not prevent you from getting head lice. Only those people infested should be treated.** Do not treat in the bathtub or shower, but have the person lean over the sink. (This confines the treatment to the scalp.)

If you choose a **pediculicidal product** (those products that contain permethrin or pyrethrin, such as Nix or RID\*):

### Do not use if:

- The person has a known sensitivity to any component in the product.
- The child is younger than 2.
  - For infants and toddlers younger than 2, it is recommended that head lice and nits be removed by combing or hand picking only.
- The person has an infestation of the eyebrows or eyelashes.
  - When these areas are infested, the person should be inspected for body lice or pubic lice. Consult your health care provider if infestation of lice occurs in these areas.

## The following groups of people should consult their health care provider before treating themselves or another person:

- Pregnant women and nursing mothers.
- People who have cancer.
- People who have neurological conditions, such as seizure disorders, cerebral palsy, etc.
- People who have acute or chronic skin conditions, such as dermatitis or open sores.
- People who have asthma and/or allergies.
- People who have allergies or sensitivity to ragweed or chrysanthemums and roses.

### Use Caution When:

- The product contains lindane (such as the prescription product Kwell\*). Products containing lindane should be used with extreme caution! Neurotoxic reactions have been reported as a result of the normal use of lindane shampoos.

\*The use of product names does not constitute endorsement. It is for identification purposes only.

## 3. Combing to remove all lice and eggs (nits).

Focus your control efforts on this step. You will need:

- A large towel to place around the person's shoulders during combing
- A box of facial tissues and a garbage bag
- A large bowl of water or access to running water
- Bobby pins or hair clips
- A good light source
- A lice comb

**The comb:** Use a **metal lice comb** to help remove the eggs (nits). Metal combs work better than plastic combs because they are sturdier and less apt to break. These combs can be purchased at a drug store.



**Combing the hair:** Slightly damp hair is best for removing nits. Use a grooming comb or hairbrush to remove tangles. Hair conditioner or vinegar rinse may reduce the effectiveness of some lice treatment products. Remember to follow the label directions on the product exactly. Separate a section of hair about the width of the metal lice comb. Place the lice comb as close to the scalp as possible and gently pull through the hair several times in all directions. Although using a nit comb will remove most of the nits, sometimes you may need to remove a stubborn nit by pinching it between two fingernails. If you are still unable to remove the nit, you can simply cut off the hair shaft with a small scissors.



Then, pin the hair out of the way by curling it flat against the head.

Rinse the comb in the water or rinse under running water, and use a clean tissue to remove lice and nits. Throw used tissue in garbage bag. Make sure the comb is clean before you use it on the hair again. Continue combing until all the nits are removed.

**After combing:** Flush the contents of the bowl down the toilet. When the hair is dry, check for stray nits and remove. **It is very important to remove all of the nits!**

**Clean-up:** Have the person put on clean clothing. Soak the lice comb for at least 10 minutes in hot water (130 degrees F). Or, you can boil a metal comb for five minutes. Use an old toothbrush to clean the comb. The comb now can be used on another family member. Wash hands thoroughly and clean under nails.

**Follow-up care:** Following the treatment, inspect hair and remove nits daily for the next seven to 10 days. If lice and/or nits continue to be seen, a second treatment is recommended. Inspect hair and remove nits again daily for the next seven to 10 days. If you continue to see lice and/or nits, contact your health care provider for further care and treatment.

**4. Wash clothes, bedding and towels that were recently worn or used (within the last two days):**

Do this step when you treat your family member; it doesn't have to be done daily. Wash in hot (130 degrees F), soapy water in a washing machine.



Dry laundry using high heat for at least 20 minutes. Items like stuffed animals, pillows and comforters that are not

washable can be vacuumed, dry-cleaned or stored in tightly sealed plastic bags for two weeks.

(Remember to keep plastic bags out of young children's reach, as they may pose a choking hazard.)

Do not share combs, brushes, hats or other articles of clothing that may be contaminated.

**5. Soak combs and brushes:**

All family combs and brushes should be soaked for at least 10 minutes in hot water (130 degrees F). If they don't already have them, it might be a good time to get every member of the home his or her own comb and brush. Tell your child not to share these items with others.



**6. Vacuum:** Vacuum rugs, carpets, upholstered furniture, pillows, mattresses, car interiors and car seats. The use of lice sprays is not recommended and is strongly discouraged, as they may be harmful to family members and pets. Vacuuming is both safe and effective!



*Even though cleaning the environment is important, excessive cleaning, such as scrubbing walls, is not necessary. Cleaning with bleach and household cleaners will not kill lice or nits. Daily head inspections and nit removal will go much farther in the management of head lice.*

Excerpts of this fact sheet were adapted from the "Quick Guide for Removing Headlice Safely," which was originally produced by the University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension in Lancaster County.