

# Questions and Answers About...



## What are head lice?

Head lice are blood-sucking insects that live on the head and scalp. They can't reproduce without the warmth of the human head, nor can they survive without the blood provided by the scalp. They are about the size of a sesame seed, and while they can crawl very fast, they can't jump or fly. It is best to use a magnifying glass to see them well.

Head lice should not be confused with body lice or crab lice. They are found only on humans and not on dogs, cats, or other pets.

## What are the symptoms of head lice?

Head lice cause scalp irritation when they feed. Thus, the first sign of head lice is usually itching of the head and scalp, particularly at the back of the head and around the ears.

## How are head lice spread?

Lice are spread through direct, or indirect contact with infested objects or people. When combs or brushes are shared, lice can be transported from one head to another. This is also true for the sharing of hats and other personal items, or clothing that is used or worn on the head. As long as lice or their eggs are living, they can be moved from person to person and cause infestation.

## How soon after exposure to lice would an infestation be noticed?

It might take 2 to 3 weeks to notice the itching associated with infestation, but nits can be seen before the itching begins. Nits look like white or dark ovals, and are most noticeable on the back of the neck and around the ears, at the very base of the hair shaft [close to the scalp].

# Head Lice



Louse nit on hair shaft

## What is the treatment for head lice?

1. There are products called "pediculicides" which can either be bought over-the-counter, or with a prescription from a health care provider. Pediculicides contain chemicals that kill lice. These products should be used carefully, and only after the directions are read thoroughly. It is important to remember that **NO PEDICULICIDE TREATMENT IS 100% EFFECTIVE.**
2. It is important to remove all lice and nits by hand. You can do this using a lice comb - a comb with very fine teeth. You can also use your fingernails, a pet "flea comb", or baby safety scissors to remove nits and adult lice.

3. Check all household members at the same time, so that everyone needing it can be treated **AT THE SAME TIME.**
4. The home environment, such as bedding, clothing, etc., must also be treated at the same time.

## How can head lice infestation be prevented?

- Teach children not to share clothing, hats, brushes, or combs with other children.
- Make head checks part of routine hygiene. Check children's heads once a week to find lice early. The earlier lice are found, the easier they are to treat.
- Teach children to hang coats and other personal belongings so that they don't touch the coats or personal belongings of other students.
- Work with schools as necessary to eliminate head lice.

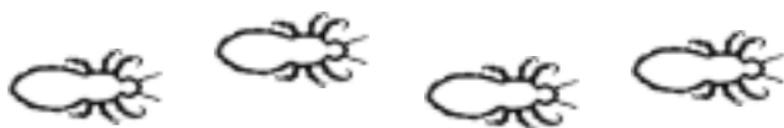
Contact the local county health department or school personnel for specific information regarding head lice. Additional information sheets, treatment steps, and "Public Health Recommendations for the Prevention and Control of Head Lice Infestation in Schools and Child Care Settings" can be found on the Oklahoma State Department of Health web site [www.health.state.ok.us](http://www.health.state.ok.us).



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# How To Treat Head Lice

Contact your private physician or local county health department for information on the treatment of head lice.



1. Purchase a lice treatment from your local pharmacy.
2. Remove clothing and have child lean over a sink. Provide a towel to cover eyes and face.
3. Apply shampoo to **dry** hair according to the instructions on the box. Be sure to leave the treatment on the hair for the right length of time. After treatment, wash with regular shampoo.
4. While hair is wet, use a nit removal comb to comb through 1 inch sections of hair. Start against the scalp and comb to the end of the hair. Rinse the hair and scalp when completed.
5. After hair is dry, recheck entire head for stray nits. Remove any remaining nits.
6. Put on clean clothing.
7. Examine all family members and treat other infested persons at the same time. Do NOT dilute shampoo with water.
8. Washable clothing, coats, hats, bedding and towels that have had contact to an infested person should be washed or dried on a hot cycle. Dry cleaning is acceptable.
9. Combs and brushes should be washed in lice shampoo or hot (130°F) water for 5-10 minutes.
10. Vacuum house, furniture, car upholstery, and car seats thoroughly. Vacuum or wash pillows and stuffed animals.
11. Repeat (steps 2 through 10) in 7 to 10 days.
12. **Lice treatments are NOT 100% effective! Nit removal is important to prevent reinfestation of the person and to prevent the spread of lice to other members of the family.**



Pediculicides Available in the United States	Brand Name	Lice Killing Time	Application Time	% of Nits Killed
Permethrin	Nix	10-15 Minutes	10 Minutes	70-80%
Pyrethrum/Pyrethrin	A-200, RID, R&C, Clear	10-23 Minutes	10 Minutes	70-80%
Lindane	Generic forms	140-230 Minutes	4 Minutes	45-70%
Malathion	Ovide	5-10 Minutes	8-12 Hours	95%



**NOTE:**

- Use of brand names is for identification purposes only and does not constitute endorsement by the Oklahoma State Department of Health. There may be other brand names on the market which are not listed due to space constraints.
- Consult with health care provider regarding use of these products on children under 2 years of age, pregnant, or nursing women.
- The Oklahoma State Department of Health recommends mechanical removal of lice as an alternative to a chemical treatment regimen. Manually removing lice and their nits prevents the side effects to health caused by most chemical treatment programs.



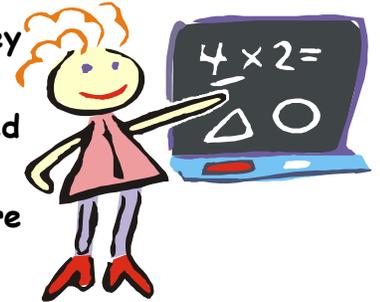
# The Do's and Don'ts of Treating Head Lice



## DO'S

- ⚡ If using a chemical to treat head lice, DO use only products made to treat head lice on people.
- ⚡ DO use any treatment only after reading all the directions well.
- ⚡ DO use treatment on DRY HAIR.
- ⚡ DO keep treatments out of eyes and mouth.
- ⚡ DO follow treatment by combing hair well with a lice comb to get out all dead lice and nits.
- ⚡ Do comb hair with a lice comb every day for at least 1 week.

- ⚡ DON'T buy home and garden insect killing products or shampoo that kills fleas and ticks on animals and put them on hair. They can make people who use them very, very sick.
- ⚡ DON'T borrow or use a friend's treatment. Some are prescribed by how much that person weighs.
- ⚡ DON'T use more of ANY treatment than the directions say. More medicine does not = better, faster lice killing.
- ⚡ DON'T split one treatment between two (or more) children.
- ⚡ DON'T use things like alcohol, kerosene, or gasoline. They can easily catch fire and burn the person using them.



## DON'TS

**Remember: If a product can kill lice, it can hurt you or your kids, if it is not used properly.**



Also remember that the best and safest way to get rid of lice and nits is to **COMB, COMB, COMB**. Combing with a good lice comb **EVERY DAY** for 1 to 2 weeks, can remove lice before they mate and remove nits before they hatch.

Adding conditioner or creme rinse to just-shampooed hair will make it slippery enough for a lice comb to go through well. Long hair may need to be cut so that combing can be done more easily.

A strong lamp or bright sunlight should be used while combing so that lice can be seen better and removed.

Wipe the comb with a tissue or paper towel after each pass through the hair. Throw each used tissue away in a bag. Take the bag to the trash right after combing is finished.

Comb every day even if using a chemical treatment. No treatment kills all nits.

Wash in hot water, or bag for 14 days, household items such as sheets, towels, brushes and hats, at the same time that hair is being combed or treated.

Teach kids not to share hats, coats, scarves, batting helmets, baseball caps, brushes and combs. Anything that touches the head of another child can pass head lice.

Keep children with nits or live lice at home until all nits and lice have been removed or killed. Live lice can move from one child to others in their classroom or day care.

If you have any questions about getting rid of head lice, or if you need more help, call your local county health department, or see your school nurse.



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## HEAD LICE CONTROL MEASURES TIP SHEET

1. Examine the hair and scalp of EVERYONE in the household. Advise parents of close playmates and friends to examine children for head lice. Advise frequent visitors or persons whom the infested person has recently visited to be examined also.
2. When using a head louse shampoo, be sure to follow instructions exactly. DO NOT over treat. Some louse shampoos can be neurotoxic and overuse can damage the nervous system. Wear gloves when treating more than one person with head louse shampoo. If more than two treatments are required to control an infestation, talk to the School Nurse(s) or the Health Department about alternative methods.
3. Do not use products that coat the egg sacs, such as vegetable oil or mayonnaise, etc. Such measures may destroy living lice, but will protect the eggs from treatment efforts and they will later hatch, causing a reinfestation.
4. Petroleum products such as kerosene and gasoline, and insecticides such as ant, roach and insect poisons are dangerous. Pet shampoos are not made for people. DO NOT use these products.
5. After treating the infested person's hair, blow dry. Wrap the hair in a damp towel soaked in vinegar for at least 15 minutes. This can help loosen the nits from the hair shafts.
6. Follow combing instructions exactly. Be sure to set the comb deeply into the strand of hair as close to the scalp as possible, and clean louse eggs off of the comb AFTER EACH STROKE.
7. REMOVE EVERY NIT. Do not depend on the shampoo to do a complete kill. **The best head louse shampoos kill only 80% of the nits. The only 100% SURE CURE for louse infestation is the removal of all eggs.**
8. Adult head lice can survive off the human scalp for up to two days. Create a louse-free environment. For at least one week, clean or vacuum all places people lay their heads, including sofas, chairs, and even the car seats DAILY. Be sure to take the vacuum cleaner OUTSIDE to empty or change the bag DAILY. Do not reuse any bags used to store the nonwashable items. ALLOW enough time for the hot water tank to reheat water to 130°F between laundry loads. Avoid using insecticide household spray. It is not effective and may cause respiratory distress in children and pets.
9. Examine the hair of every household member and remove all nits DAILY. If combs, brushes and items such as headphones must be shared, examine and clean them between users.
10. Do not try on caps and scarves at the store prior to purchasing them. If you wish to buy them, do so and run them through a hot dryer or store them for 14 days before use.
11. Talk to your school about their policy on the sharing of sports headgear, batting caps, headphones, and the storage of coats, caps, etc., in the classroom or on the playground. If you find practices that may spread head lice, notify the School Nurse(s) or the Health Department.
12. DO FOLLOW the school policy on nit removal. If the school has a NO-NIT policy, ALL NITS must be removed from the hair shafts before the child can return to classes whether or not the nits are capable of hatching.