

# Lice Awareness Wednesday

## Frequently Asked Questions from [www.headlice.org](http://www.headlice.org)

### 1. How do you treat a home or school for lice?

Homes or schools don't get head lice – people do. Head lice are human parasites and require human blood to survive. Vacuuming is the safest and best way to remove lice or fallen hairs with attached nits from upholstered furniture, rugs, stuffed animals or car seats – wherever someone with head lice may have rested their head. Pesticidal sprays are unwarranted and may pose personal and environmental hazards. Vacuum and save your time and energy for what benefits you the most – thorough nit removal.

### 2. Do I have to treat everyone in the house?

Use a nit-removal comb to check everyone. Even if lice are found on an individual, careful consideration should be given before deciding to use a lice killing treatment because each person has unique health vulnerabilities.

### 3. Do I need to spray my furniture and bedding?

Head lice are human parasites and require human blood to survive. They are not environmental pests so pesticidal sprays for furniture and bedding are unnecessary and a serious risk to health. Vacuuming is the safest and best way to remove lice or fallen hairs with attached nits from upholstered furniture, rugs, stuffed animals and cars.

### 4. Do I have to bag stuffed animals and other items?

Experts used to suggest bagging items such as stuffed animals for a number of weeks to help bring infestations under control. Since lice cannot survive without human blood, this is unnecessary; vacuuming is a sufficient safeguard for any questionable areas or items that may be in contact with those who are infested. You can also put bed linens, stuffed animals and other items in a dryer for 30 minutes. Save your physical and emotional energies for screening and thorough lice and nit removal.

### 5. How are head lice spread?

Head lice can be spread whenever there is direct contact of the head or hair with an infested individual. Lice can also be spread through the sharing of personal articles like hats, towels, brushes, helmets, hair ties, etc. There is also a possibility of spreading head lice via a pillow, headrest or similar items. Head lice do not jump or fly and generally cannot survive longer than 24 hours off the host.

### 6. Do head lice jump?

Head lice do not have hind legs to hop or jump. They also do not have wings and cannot fly.

### 7. Can you catch head lice from cars, pillows or furniture?

If a louse comes off the head and is left behind (i.e., on a pillow or head rest), it may be possible for the louse to infest another individual who places their head in that area. Vacuuming is recommended for any areas or items that may be in contact with those who are infested.

### 8. Can you catch head lice in a pool, pond or lake?

Swimming with someone who has lice carries no greater risk of transmission than any other activity. When lice are in water, they go into a state of suspended animation but remain firmly locked onto the

hair – literally hanging on for dear life. This is how they survive shampooing, rain, seawater and swimming pools. Risk of transmission will occur with the sharing of towels, piling clothing or towels, storing personal items in close proximity or direct head to head contact.

9. Can you catch head lice from headphones or helmets?

The extent to which head lice are transmitted to others via headphones or helmets is unknown. Ideally, risk of transmission can be eliminated by making sure children have and use their own equipment. If this is not possible, you can clean the items between children by wiping them with a damp paper towel. An additional measure would be to encourage each child to wear a baseball cap to help shield the hair from contact with the item. Helmets and headphone should never be sprayed. Most importantly – and best for the entire community – all parents should screen their children regularly.

10. How can I tell if the nits are dead or alive?

Children, like adults, do not want nits in their hair – dead or alive. The time it would take to make the distinction is time far better spent removing ALL the nits.

11. Where do head lice come from?

Head lice do not come out of the air or from the ground. They are human parasites and have probably been here since the beginning of time. Desiccated (dried up) head lice and their eggs (nits) have been found on the hair and scalps of Egyptian mummies.

12. Do head lice carry or transmit disease?

While many have thought head lice to be only a nuisance, recent scientific study refutes this notion. DNA technology shows head lice to be the same species as the notorious body louse which has long been associated with diseases such as typhus and relapsing fever. The potential for disease transmission via the head louse should not be underestimated.

13. How can you verify successful treatment?

First, one must define treatment. Someone can be treated and still be infested. The ultimate determination that someone is no longer infested can only be accomplished with a thorough manual screening to confirm the complete absence of lice and nits.

14. What is the life cycle of the head louse?

Head lice can survive on a human host for approximately 30 days. They generally cannot survive longer than 24 hours off the host. A female louse lays 3-5 eggs a day. The eggs hatch in 7-10 days and it takes another 7-10 day for the louse to mature and lay their own eggs.

15. Do pets get head lice?

Head lice cannot be “caught” from pets and cannot survive on pets. They are human parasites and require human blood for survival.

16. Are African Americans susceptible to lice infestations?

African Americans are reported to have a much lower incidence of head lice than Caucasians, Hispanics or Asian Americans. Pediatric Dermatology cites various studies that suggest the incidence among African American schoolchildren is less than half of one percent, while the incidence among their non-black schoolmates is usually more than 10 percent. Even though African Americans may be less susceptible to infestations, this should not be grounds for complacency; African Americans can, and do, get head lice.