

The Facts of Lice

Head lice affect more people than all other childhood communicable diseases with the exception of the common cold. Like a cold, when children come in close contact with each other, it is easy to pass head lice along. Shared hats, clothing, brushes, pillows and other personal articles are perfect vehicles to transfer lice from one person to another. It is important to act immediately to prevent their spread to other classmates and to your family as well.

Head lice are small, only about 1/16 of an inch long. They are grayish-white with dark edges. While they cannot fly and do not jump, they move quickly. That's why it is difficult to find them in a child's hair.



Diagnosis of head lice is generally made when lice eggs (called nits), which are fastened to the hair shaft, are clearly evident. Nits are teardrop in shape and also very small, only about 1/32 of an inch. They are “glued” to the hair and cannot be washed or brushed out like dandruff.

Clusters of nits may be found in any section of the hair, but they are more apt to be behind the ears and at the nape of the neck.

Getting rid of head lice and nits need not be difficult. It is a matter of washing the hair with a lice-killing product, and then very carefully removing all the nits. Removal of the nits is important to avoid reinfestation.

HEAD LICE TIPS: How to Detect the Warning Signs

With seemingly no warning, a person can become infested with head lice. But in truth, there are warning signs to alert you to the presence of head lice. If you take action at the first sight of these warning signs, you can help prevent the head lice from spreading.

Symptoms: For most people, itching is the most common symptom of head lice. However, not everyone who is affected has itching so it is important to check all students.

Locations: Look for red marks behind the child's ear and on the nape of his/her neck, as these spots are where head lice typically gather. However, lice and their eggs (called nits) can be found anywhere on the head.

Appearances: Lice are sometimes hard to see, because they're tiny, brown, and move to avoid light. But nits are tiny, whitish, and are firmly glued to the hair shaft, usually near the scalp. Nits might be mistaken for dandruff, but unlike dandruff, nits cannot be easily brushed off or removed by normal shampooing and washing.

Seasons: Increased incidence of head lice infestations occurs most frequently in the fall, between August and November; however, head lice is prevalent year-round.

Problems: Because nits adhere to the hair with a very strong, glue-like substance, it can be difficult to remove every nit. But it is critical to remove every single nit from the head, since even one living nit can lead to a reinfestation.

Tips for the Detection and Prevention of Head Lice Infestation

One of the most frustrating things about head lice is that it can spread easily and quickly through head-to-head contact with an infested person. Any item that is used by a person with head lice, especially if it touches the head or shoulders, can become the source of a head lice infestation. To reduce the risk of spreading head lice within the household, or to prevent a reoccurrence in those who already have head lice, here's what you need to do:

1. **Become a head lice detective**

- The best way to detect an infestation is to routinely check your child's head for head lice and their eggs (called nits).
- The main symptom of head lice is intense scalp itching, but you can have head lice without itching.
- Check those at risk, especially children aged five to twelve. Girls may be affected more than boys because girls are more likely to share combs, hair accessories, and clothing.
- Head lice is prevalent year round. The most common months of head lice infestation are August to November.

2. **Check for nits (lice eggs)**

- Nits are tiny and whitish in color, so you may mistake them for dandruff. But unlike dandruff, they will not brush or blow off the hair.
- Check for nits in bright light.
- Use a magnifying glass to help detect head lice and nits.
- Check the entire head, but pay close attention to the scalp. In particular, lift and separate hairs behind the ears and at the nape of the neck, as this is where head lice tend to gather.

3. **Get smart about prevention – teach your child not to share personal items**

- Combs, brushes, and headgear are some of the most common items that carry head lice from one person to another.

- Pillows, bed linens, hats, headphones, and bicycle and sports helmets can carry head lice.
- Encourage your child to share toys and books, but to keep some belongings personal and store them in a backpack if there are not private cubbies in the classroom.

4. If head lice are already in the household make a clean sweep – clean your home thoroughly

- All personal head gear (hats, hair ribbons, helmets, etc.), scarves, coats, towels, and bed linens should be cleaned by machine washing in hot water then dried using the hot cycle of a dryer for at least twenty minutes.
- Personal articles such as clothing, bedspreads, blankets, pillows, or stuffed animals that cannot be washed should be dry-cleaned or sealed in a plastic bag for a period of two weeks.
- Personal combs and brushes should be cleaned by soaking in hot water about 130° F for five to ten minutes.
- Vacuum everywhere. It is recommended that all rooms and furniture used by infested household members be thoroughly vacuumed. Vacuum all carpets, mattresses, upholstered furniture, and car seats.

Tips to Treat a Case of Head Lice

Getting rid of head lice is a time-consuming process, but it's not impossible! Fortunately, there are a number of nonprescription as well as prescription treatments available and your pharmacist or doctor can offer advice on selecting a product. After using the medication, be sure to remove every last nit, because even one nit can cause a reinfestation.

1. Get tough – treat the head with a head lice-killing product

- Over the counter treatments, usually in crème rinse or shampoo form, are available at the pharmacy.
- Use only one treatment product at a time, and follow directions carefully and completely.
- Never use the treatment product near the eyes.
- Home remedies, such as mayonnaise and petroleum jelly are not scientifically proven to work.
- Never use unapproved chemicals such as pet shampoos, gasoline, or kerosene.

2. Get picky – remove head lice and nits

The Reasons

- Treatments kill head lice, but they do not remove the nits.
- Unlike dandruff or hairspray, nits cannot be removed by blowing or brushing the hair.
- Removal of nits is absolutely necessary for proper head lice management.

The Methods

After treatment, and while hair is still damp:

- Part the hair into four sections. Select a section to work on. Start at the top of the head in the section you have picked.
- With one hand, lift a 1-inch strand of hair. Get the teeth of a comb as close to the scalp as possible and always comb away from the head.
- *If you pick nits out with your hands, you may want to wear rubber gloves, or wash hands carefully after nit removal on each child. Lice can live for a short time under your fingernails and could be spread to you or to your other children.
- Using clips, pin back each strand of hair after you have combed out the nits. Clean the comb as you go. Wipe the nits from the comb with a tissue and dispose of the tissue in a sealed bag to prevent reinfestation.
- When finished combing, recheck the entire head for nits and repeat combing if necessary.
- Check daily for head lice or nits you may have missed.
- 2-3 days after treatment with the lice killing shampoo if nits are still present and difficult to remove, apply a small amount of cooking oil (olive oil is okay) to the scalp (like you would apply a conditioner) and place a shower cap over the head. This works best if done at night. In the morning comb through the hair. The oil helps to loosen the nits. Shampoo after combing out nits then check for nits again.
- Lice are killed or stunned at about 120-140 degrees Fahrenheit. Hot air from a hair dryer will cause the hatched crawler to fall off.

When your child comes home with head lice.....

Don't panic. Anyone can get head lice. It has nothing to do with cleanliness, nor does it reflect on you as a parent.

1. **Examine your child's head** to be sure you know what the nits look like. They are tiny grayish-white eggs attached to the hair, near the scalp, especially behind the ears and at the nape of the neck and at the crown of the head.
2. **Check all other family members** to see if they are infested. Any family member with evidence of head lice must also be treated.
3. **Use an effective head lice treatment.** Your pharmacist can recommend an effective pediculicide product. When used as directed, it will be very effective in killing head lice.
4. **Remove the nits (lice eggs).** Because no pediculicide product kills all the eggs, it is **very important** to remove all traces of the nits to prevent reinfestation. A special comb for this task is usually provided with the lice treatment product. You may want to ask your pharmacist about additional rinses that quickly releases the nits from the hair, making it quick and easy to comb out.

5. **Wash all clothes**, bed linens and towels in hot water and dry on hot cycle or at least 20 minutes. Items that cannot be safely washed, such as stuffed animals, should be dry cleaned or placed in plastic garbage bags and sealed for two weeks.
6. **Clean combs and brushes in hot, soapy water.** Water should be at least
7. 130° F, and it is advisable to let combs and brushes soak in the hot water for 10 minutes.
8. **Vacuum everywhere** to make sure your home is free of lice. Vacuum carpets, pillows, mattresses, upholstered furniture; anything that might hold lice. Do a thorough job and discard the vacuum bag promptly.
9. **Head lice survive only on humans**, and do not affect family pets. To eliminate head lice and nits from your home, follow the directions above. Doing a thorough job will prevent their spread in the neighborhood.

Please bring your child back nit free. It is critical that you not only kill the lice with a lice killing shampoo but also remove all the eggs (nits).

Although treatment shampoos provide a nit comb, they are not always 100% effective. Nits are literally glued to the hair and can be stubbornly difficult to remove.

If eggs remain in the hair, reinfestation may occur. That's why schools have a "No Nit Policy" which means children are not allowed to return until their hair is nit free. (Branchburg Schools have a "No Nit Policy").

Thank you for taking the time to do a thorough and complete job. Here are some helpful pointers to assist you in the nit removal process.

How to Find and Remove Nits

Getting Started

- Select comfortable area with strong overhead lighting (Hint: a child's favorite TV program or DVD can be a comfortable distraction)
- Keep tissues at hand to wipe nits from comb for quick disposal
- A supply of hair clips will be needed to pin back hair

Finding the Nits

- They are white in color and about the size of a straight pinhead
- They are cemented to the hair shaft close to the scalp
- Usually found on the nape and around the ears and crown of the head

Combing the Nits

- Combing can be tedious and can take hours
- A special lice egg remover product can save combing time
- Divide hair into sections
- Hold sections at ends

- Start as close to the scalp as possible
- Stroke hair repeatedly until all nits are gone
- Pin back clean sections as you go

Cleaning up

- Dispose of all tissues and the nit comb
- If you have used your own combs or brushes, soak them in very hot water for 5-10 minutes

Resources: Head Lice Resource Kit
A Guide for School Nurses

Reviewed by: National Association of School Nurses

BRANCBURG SCHOOL HEALTH SERVICES PROCEDURES

- The school nurse examines students suspected of having lice/nits.
- Student(s) with lice/nits are isolated while awaiting parent/guardian pickup.
- The school nurse offers explanation and directions to parents/guardian of child with lice/nits.
- Sibling, classmates, staff, and bus mates are checked.
- Custodians are notified to appropriately clean rooms. Items such as stuffed animals are placed in a sealed bag for a minimum of two weeks.
- The transportation supervisor is notified.
- Letters are sent home to notify parents of affected classrooms/buses.
- Students in affected homerooms place coats in bags for a minimum of two weeks.
- Student admitted to school:
 - Must be brought back to school by parent.
 - Parent discusses treatment.
 - Nurse examines student to confirm that he/she are nit free.
 - If nit free, child remains in school.
 - If not nit free child is sent home.
 - Students continued to be checked for a two week period.

Branchburg School Health Services as per BOE Pediculosis Policy