

Guidelines for the Identification and Treatment of Head Lice

Checking for Infestation

1. Review some head lice pictures to help you understand what you are looking for in your child's hair, including live lice and nits (lice eggs).
2. Wash your child's hair with a regular shampoo and hair conditioner and then check your child's hair after your rinse and dry it, but while it is still damp. The hair conditioner can make it easier to comb through your child's hair.
3. Look for live lice crawling on your child's head. Although they may be anywhere, they are often found at the back of your child's head, near his neck, and behind his ears. Be aware that lice move very quickly, and are only about the size of a sesame seed, so you may have to be patient to find one. Also, the average child, even with a moderate lice infestation, may have very few live lice -- about 10 or 12 lice.
4. Nits, or lice eggs, are much easier to find, and can usually be located on individual hairs close to your child's scalp. Unlike dandruff, which can look similar to nits, it is often hard to get a nit off of a hair, as they are almost glued on to the hairs.
5. Be sure to do lice checks on every one else in the house, especially if you find nits or live lice, and continue to check your child for live lice and new nits every few days.
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Tips:

1. Head lice often cause itching, so if you see your child often scratching his head, especially the back of his head -- check him for head lice.
2. If your child has a lot of hair or very long hair, it can help to part your child's hair and keep it separated with clips and then go through each section -- one at a time.
3. See your pediatrician if you aren't sure if your child has live lice or nits, or if you think that you keep finding nits after repeated treatments.

General Treatment Guidelines

Treatment for head lice is recommended for persons diagnosed with an active infestation. All household members and other close contacts should be checked; those persons with evidence of an active infestation should be treated. Retreatment of head lice usually is recommended because no approved pediculicide (peh-DICK-you-luh-side) is completely ovicidal. To be most effective, retreatment should occur after all eggs have hatched but before new eggs are produced. Check the product directions for retreatment schedule/recommendations.

Treatment requires using an over-the-counter (OTC) or prescription medication. Follow these treatment steps:

1. Before applying treatment, it may be helpful to remove clothing that can become wet or stained during treatment.
2. Apply lice medicine, also called pediculicide, according to the instructions contained in the box or printed on the label. If the infested person has very long hair (longer than shoulder length), it may be necessary to use a second bottle. Pay special attention to instructions on the label or in the box regarding how long the medication should be left on the hair and how it should be washed off.

WARNING: Do not use a creme rinse, combination shampoo/conditioner, or conditioner before using lice medicine. Do not re-wash the hair for 1-2 days after the lice medicine is removed.

3. Have the infested person put on clean clothing after treatment.
4. If a few live lice are still found 8-12 hours after treatment, but are moving more slowly than before, do not retreat. The medicine may take longer to kill all the lice. Comb dead and any remaining live lice out of the hair using a fine-toothed nit comb.
5. If, after 8-12 hours of treatment, no dead lice are found and lice seem as active as before, the medicine may not be working. Do not retreat until speaking with your health care provider; a different lice medicine (pediculicide) may be necessary. If your health care provider recommends a different pediculicide, carefully follow the treatment instructions contained in the box or printed on the label.
6. Nit (head lice egg) combs, often found in lice medicine packages, should be used to comb nits and lice from the hair shaft. Many flea combs made for cats and dogs are also effective.
7. After each treatment, checking the hair and combing with a nit comb to remove nits and lice every 2-3 days may decrease the chance of self-reinfestation. Continue to check for 2-3 weeks to be sure all lice and nits are gone.
8. Retreatment generally is recommended for most prescription and non-prescription (over-the-counter) drugs after 9-10 days in order to kill any surviving hatched lice before they produce new eggs.

Supplemental Measures

Head lice do not survive long if they fall off a person and cannot feed. You don't need to spend a lot of time or money on housecleaning activities. Follow these steps to help avoid re-infestation by lice that have recently fallen off the hair or crawled onto clothing or furniture.

1. Machine wash and dry clothing, bed linens, and other items that the infested person wore or used during the 2 days before treatment using the hot water (130°F) laundry cycle and the high heat drying cycle. Clothing and items that are not washable can be dry-cleaned **OR** sealed in a plastic bag and stored for 2 weeks.
2. Soak combs and brushes in hot water (at least 130°F) for 5-10 minutes.
3. Vacuum the floor and furniture, particularly where the infested person sat or lay. However, the risk of getting infested by a louse that has fallen onto a rug or carpet carpet or furniture is very small. Head lice survive less than 1-2 days if they fall off a person and cannot feed; nits cannot hatch and usually die within a week if they are not kept at the same temperature as that found close to the human scalp. Spending much time and money on housecleaning activities is not necessary to avoid reinfestation by lice or nits that may have fallen off the head or crawled onto furniture or clothing.
4. Do not use fumigant sprays; they can be toxic if inhaled or absorbed through the skin.

Which medicine is best?

If you aren't sure which medicine to use or how to use a particular medicine, always ask your physician, pharmacist, or other health care provider.