



Frequently Asked Questions about Head Lice

What are head lice?

Head lice are tiny grey/brown insects that live only on the scalp of human beings. They crawl quickly but cannot fly or jump. They are not found on household pets. Having head lice does not mean you are unclean. They do not spread disease. The saliva from head lice when feeding can cause itching. Scratching may cause sores, which can get infected. Adult female lice glue eggs on the hair shaft close to the scalp. Live eggs are oval and dark in colour. They stick to the hair and do not fall off if you touch them. Even after the eggs hatch (7-10 days), the white shells stay on the hair shaft. Baby lice start at pencil-dot size and mature in 7-14 days.

How are Lice Spread?

Anyone can get head lice. Head lice move by crawling; they cannot hop or fly. Head lice are spread by direct contact with the hair of an infected person. When children play, their heads often touch and lice crawl from one child to another and then on to family members. Head lice may also spread by sharing brushes, combs, hats, and anything that is worn or used on the head – remind children not to share these items. Braid or tie long hair back e.g., in a ponytail. Check children's heads weekly and especially following school breaks, sleepovers, and camps.

How do I check for Lice?

Use natural light or a bright light and a magnifying glass if you have one. For [detection combing](#), Part the hair in small sections and look near the scalp. Lice crawl very fast, so they are difficult to find. Look for dark eggs glued on the hair close to the scalp. These have been laid recently. They are often found in warm spots e.g., on the hair behind the ears, back of the neck and close to the scalp. Check all the people that live in your house.

What do I do if someone in my family has head lice?

If you find lice, tell anyone in close contact such as family members, friends, and classmates so they can be checked for lice. Everyone in the house who has head lice will need to be treated for head lice at the same time to control the spread. Treatment products are to be used only on people who have live head lice. They do not prevent people from getting head lice.

How do I get rid of head lice?

There are many head lice treatment products. Methods using olive oil, mineral oil, tea tree oil, and hair gel have not been scientifically tested, they are not considered reliable or safe treatments for head lice. Consult with a pharmacist for the best and safest products to treat your child. Read all instructions carefully and follow them step by step so that the product will work effectively. **After each treatment, checking the hair and combing with a nit comb to remove nits and lice every 2–3 days will help decrease the chance of self-reinfestation.** Continue to check for 2–3 weeks to be sure all lice and nits are gone. Use a lice comb with very small spaces between the teeth such as the [Nit Free Terminator](#) or [Licemeister](#) to remove any eggs sticking to the hair shaft. Any new infestation is more easily recognized if you remove all the eggs.



A second treatment 7 - 10 days after the first treatment is usually suggested to kill any newly hatched lice from eggs you have missed. Limit use of regular shampoo and hair products until a few days after first and second treatment to allow the head lice product to work effectively. Check head weekly to make sure lice are gone and do not return.

How I check my child's head?

Follow the method for [detection combing](#). Start by using a fine-tooth comb. Comb then remove the smaller eggs by hand.

- Sit under a bright light or in sunlight
- Have your child watch television, a video or read to keep still. Work for 10-15 minutes at a time.
- Work with a small section of wet hair (clip the rest out of the way)
- Comb the smaller eggs off the hair strands using your thumbnail and fingernail.
- Continue section by section until you remove all the eggs.

During an infestation, check the head at least twice weekly 4 weeks to make sure all the eggs have been removed. Once the infestation is gone, continue to check the head on a weekly basis as part of the child's routine personal hygiene.

Do I need to wash or clean anything else?

Soak combs, brushes in hot water and head lice product for 5 - 10 minutes. Wash clothes, hats, towels, and bedding used in the past three days, in hot soapy water and dry in a dryer for 20 minutes after the first and second treatment. Vacuuming is helpful, but special sprays are not needed on furniture or floors. Excessive cleaning is not necessary since lice live only a short time away from the head.

When can my child return to school?

Parents and guardians are encouraged to do weekly screening and checking of their child's head to help manage head lice outbreaks in the school. A child should not return to school until treatment begins and there are no live lice present. The [Canadian Paediatric Society](#) encourages schools to avoid no-nit policies because of the frequency of misdiagnosis and because head lice do not spread disease. Detecting nits alone does not indicate a live infestation. The CPS claims that no-nit policies are outdated and based on reactionary tendencies rather than scientific information.

Where can I go for additional information?

Additional information is available under parent resources at www.eips.ca and the [AHS website](#) or contact 811 [Health Link](#).