

Facts about Head Lice

Head lice are tiny insects that live on the scalp.

They are about the size of a sesame seed. They lay eggs, called nits. Nits stick to the hair, very close to the scalp. Head lice do not spread disease. Children with head lice may have itchy scalps and scratch their heads.

How are Head Lice Spread?

Head lice can be spread through direct head-to-head contact with a person who has lice. They can also be spread by sharing combs, hats, hairbrushes and headphones.

How to Find Out If Your Child Has Head Lice

Where to Look

- close to the scalp
- behind the ears
- back of the neck
- top of the head

What to Look For

- child scratching the head
- adult lice (sometimes difficult to see because they are very small)
- eggs - also called nits (easier to see than adult lice)

Note: nits are firmly attached to the hair, close to the scalp. They are greyish-white and oval in shape and may look like dandruff but cannot be brushed off.

How to Check

- shampoo the hair and rinse
- put on enough hair conditioner to cover the whole scalp
- use a wide-toothed comb to untangle the hair if necessary
- have your child lean over the sink
- use a fine-toothed comb to search for lice and nits
- comb the hair from the back of the head to the front
- after each stroke, wipe the comb on a paper towel and look for lice

How to Treat

If you find any lice or nits, you will have to treat:

You can treat head lice, using the “wet-combing” method, using hair conditioner as noted above, or you can use a head lice shampoo, available at drug stores.

Ask your Public Health Nurse or Licensing Officer for a pamphlet that explains how to treat using the “wet-combing” method or refer to the BC Health File on Head Lice available at: www.healthlinkbc.ca/healthlinkbc-files/head-lice



What to Do at Home

- If another child has head lice, check your child’s hair for nits immediately. It’s a good idea to check children once a week for head lice.
- If anyone in your family has head lice, treat everyone living in the home on the same day and do the following things on the same day:
 - Clean brushes and combs with very hot water. Everyone should use their own brush or comb.
 - Wash hats, pillow cases and stuffed animals in hot water. Use a hot dryer, if possible.
- Encourage children not to share hats, brushes, combs, headphones, etc.
- Let the child care centre or school know, if your child has head lice.



Children with head lice should begin treatment before they return to the child care centre or school.

It is not necessary to do a lot of house cleaning, as the lice do not live long once they are off the scalp.