

# Head Lice

Head lice are tiny bugs about the size of a sesame seed. They live in the hair and bite the scalp to suck blood. They do not fly or jump, but they can move very fast. This makes it hard to find them in the hair. They infect people of all ages and races, but are less common in African American children because of the shape of the hair shaft.

Nits are the eggs of the lice. They look like yellowish white or brown dandruff. Head lice attach their eggs to shafts of hair with a waterproof "glue". The eggs are laid close to the scalp. Look for eggs at the back of the neck and behind the ears. These eggs cannot be washed out or brushed out of the hair. They must be picked out one at a time.

## Causes

Lice can spread quickly from one person to another if the persons:

- Share hats, scarves, combs, brushes, hair clips or barrettes, hair bands, helmets or clothing
- Lie on the same bed, couch or carpet
- Play close together
- Use items stored in closets or lockers that have the lice or eggs on them

## Signs

- Itching or tickling feeling that something is moving around or tickling the head.
- Red marks or sores on the scalp sometimes with drainage and crusting. These are often found behind the ears or on the back of the neck. If the skin is scratched open, the sores can get infected and must be treated by your doctor.
- Scratching the head. Sometimes it takes weeks for a child to start scratching.

## Treatment

Your child's doctor can suggest a medicated lice shampoo, cream or lotion. You can buy some lice products, such as Nix Crème Rinse, at your local pharmacy without a prescription. Some of the products will have a special nit comb in the package or you can buy one separately. This special comb can help find and remove eggs. It is very important to remove all of the lice eggs and to treat all family members.

### How to Use Nix Creme Rinse (or store brands of permethrin)

1. Wash the hair with regular shampoo. Do not use a conditioner. It can keep the lice medicine from working. Rinse with warm water and towel dry. Do not use this towel again until it has been laundered.
2. Put white vinegar on the hair to help loosen the "glue" that holds the eggs on the hair.
3. Put enough of the Nix Creme Rinse to wet the hair and scalp completely. Be sure to wet the back of the neck and behind the ears. If the Nix Creme Rinse gets in the eyes, rinse right away with cool water.
4. Leave the Nix Creme Rinse on the hair for 10 minutes, but no longer.
5. Rinse the hair and skin around the scalp well with water. Rub with a fresh dry towel. **Do not** use a hair dryer – some lice products are flammable.
6. Comb the hair with a fine comb to find the eggs. It may help to divide the hair in sections. All eggs must be removed! It might take 2 or 3 hours or more, and you may have to pick out the eggs by hand if the comb does not work.
7. Put the eggs in a plastic bag, tie it closed and throw it away. Wash your hands well and scrub under your fingernails.
8. Dress your child in clean clothing.

If you purchase Rid or store brands of piperonyl butoxide, apply the product to dry hair. Start at Step 3 above and follow the steps to use this product instead of Nix.

## **Special Warnings About Lice Products**

- If you or your child is allergic to ragweed, check with your doctor or pharmacist before using any brand of medicated rinse or shampoo. The active ingredient in some brands such as Rid, Pronto and A-200 could cause a serious allergic reaction.
- Do not use lice products on children younger than 2 years.
- Do not handle or use lice products if you are pregnant or breastfeeding.
- House pets do not carry human lice and should not be treated.

## **After Treatment**

- If you see live lice 10 days or more after the treatment, you can repeat the treatment one time. Check the hair and scalp of all family members every day. If you find eggs or lice, treat their hair and clothing the same way.
- **Do not** wash the hair for 2 days after the treatment.
- **Do not** use hair conditioner for 10 days.
- Pest control sprays can be harmful to children and should not be used in the home.
- Head lice can live away from the human body for only 55 hours.

## **To Clear Lice from the Home**

- Wash all washable clothing (including hats, scarves, and coats) and all bed linens, towels and washcloths that have had contact with anyone with lice in the past 3 days. Machine-wash in hot, soapy water and dry. Use the hot cycle of a dryer for at least 20 minutes.
- Soak combs, brushes, hair barrettes, hair bands and sports helmets in very hot water (130°F) for 10 minutes.
- Pillows, stuffed animals, clothing and other things that cannot be washed may be dry cleaned or put in air tight plastic bags for 2 weeks.
- Vacuum all carpets and furniture. Put the vacuum cleaner's dust bag in a plastic bag, tie tightly and throw away.

## **School and Other Parents**

- Tell your child's school that your child has lice. The other children will be checked and treated if needed.
- Check with your child's school. In some school systems the child's hair must be free of all eggs before the child may go back to school.
- Tell the parents of your child's friends so they can check their children.

## **Prevention**

- Teach your child to "Never share what touches the hair". Children should not let anyone else use their comb, brush, hats, scarves, pillows, hair accessories or helmets. They should not borrow them from others either.
- Shampoo the hair 2 or 3 times a week.

**Talk to your child's doctor or your local health department if you have any questions or concerns.**

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