Points to Remember

- Continue to watch your child for signs of lice for two weeks after the last live bug is found. Parents often quit control measures too soon and start the infestation over again with surviving bugs.
- Good communication is helpful for everyone! It is important to tell everyone who has had close head-to-head contact with your child since the infestation began so that all exposed people can be working on the problem at the same time to limit re-exposure.
- Head lice do not spread disease. They should not be considered a medical or public health problem.
- Just as with other bug bites, itching may linger after the bugs are gone.
- Teach your children prevention hints:
  - Limit head-to-head contact with other children at play time or sleep overs.
  - Avoid sharing personal items with other children such as combs, hats, or hair ribbons.
  - Place coats and belongings on racks or in lockers (not in piles with others' coats).
  - **Do not try on hats at the store.**
- Watch your child for signs of a secondary scalp infection from intense scratching.
- Do not treat members of the family who do not show signs of infestation. Be sure to check all family members every 2-3 days for signs of head lice.

For more information, call your child's school nurse or your local public health agency.

Online Resources

Center for Disease Control Web Site:
www.cdc.gov/parasites/lice/

National Pediculosis Association Web Site:
www.headlice.org

Canva

Revised 9/2022

HEAD LICE: A PARENT'S GUIDE

Wood County Health Department

Wood County Health Department

Wood County River Block Building
111 W Jackson St, 3rd Floor
Wisconsin Rapids, WI 54495
Phone: 715-421-8911

Wood County Annex & Health Center
1600 North Chestnut Ave
Marshfield, WI 54449
Phone: 715-387-8646
Fax: 715-421-8962

Website:http://www.co.wood.wi.us/health/

Lifecycle of Head Lice

RULE #1
Check the entire family daily during an infestation. Treat only those who have evidence of active lice.

Nit (egg)

The first life stage of head lice is the nit. Nits are very small, oval-shaped and are normally laid on the hair close to the scalp. They hatch in 8-9 days. Nits stick tightly to the hair, unlike dandruff which can be easily blown off the hair. There can be live and dead nits. Nits not hatched die within one week. Nits that are likely to hatch are located no more than ¼ inch from the scalp. Nits located further than ¼ inch from the scalp have already hatched or are empty nits. Newly laid nits may be tan, coffee-colored or darker. White or sandy-colored nits are usually empty shells or hatched nits.

Nymph

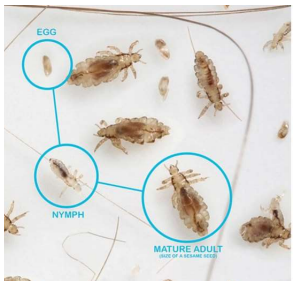
The second life stage for head lice is the nymph. Nymphs hatch from the nit and look like adult lice but are smaller. Nymphs mature into adults about 9-12 days after hatching.

Adult

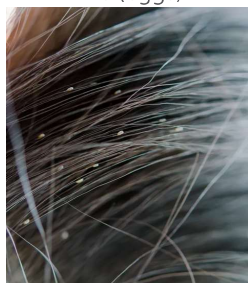
The final life stage is the adult. The adult louse is tan to grayish-white in color and can live up to 30 days on a person's head. Female lice lay about 10 eggs per day. Lice will die within one or two days if it falls off a person.

Size
Lice are the size of a grain of pepper when newly hatched and grow to the size of a sesame seed. They shy from light and move quickly.

Nit (egg), Nymph, Adult



Nits (eggs)



Nits, Nymphs, Adults

Photo Credits: 1) NitWitsForKids.com 2) Parents.com 3) GreaterVancouverLiceClinic.org

House Cleaning

RULE #4
Environmental lice sprays are not recommended. Vacuum areas most used by the person.

Try not to focus only on house cleaning activities, because bugs do not survive more than 24-48 hours without a host. Routine house cleaning, including vacuuming of carpeting, rugs, furniture, car seats and other fabric covered items, as well as laundering of bedding and clothing worn or used by the infested person is sufficient. Only items that have been in contact with the head of the infested person need to be cleaned.

- Wash bedding, towels and clothing worn in the last two days in a HOT (130º F) washer and dry on the high heat cycle in the dryer. Do not forget to wash the coats and hats. The heat kills the bugs, not the soap.
- Articles that cannot be washed may be dry cleaned or bagged for 14 days to kill the nits.
- Clean brushes, hair accessories, and combs by soaking in HOT water (not boiling) for 10 minutes.
- Head lice do not live on pets. Pets do not play a role in the spread of head lice.

Treatment Failure

RULE #5
Lice treatment shampoos/lotions are toxic pesticides and should not be overused. Seek professional help from your school nurse, doctor, or public health agency if you have used the OTC (over the counter: not prescribed) lice product more than 2-3 times without success.

If the lice treatment shampoo/lotion doesn't seem to be working, a different treatment may be needed. Here are several common reasons why treatment for head lice fails:

- Misdiagnosis: The symptoms are not caused by an active head lice infestation.
- Not following proper treatment instructions: Not applying a second treatment when instructed to do so, re-treating too soon, too late, or using an insufficient amount of lice treatment shampoo/lotion on the hair.
- Resistance to the lice treatment shampoo/lotion used: Another lice treatment may need to be selected.
- Re-infestation: The person was successfully treated, but the person became infested again.
- Using an inadequate amount of lice treatment shampoo/lotion (long hair may require two bottles).
- Using regular shampoo on hair too soon after treatment. Do not use regular shampoo on hair for at least 48 hours after lice treatment shampoo/lotion.
- Using a conditioner or regular shampoo containing conditioner. This may interfere with the lice treatment.

Home Remedies

Mayonnaise, olive oil, petroleum jelly, essential oils, vinegar, and isopropyl alcohol have sometimes been used to kill head lice. However, there is no scientific evidence that home remedies are effective treatments, so these products are not FDA approved to treat head lice and do not meet safety and efficacy standards compared to those established for pharmaceutical products.

How Lice are Spread

RULE #3
Don't lose your sense of humor!

- Lice are spread through direct head-to-head contact with an infested person (ex: at home, school, sleepovers, sports activities, camp) or occasionally through sharing personal items (ex: hats, combs, hair ties, pillows, headrests). It is not recommended to try on hats in the store.
- Lice do not jump or fly.
- If your child has head lice all household members and other close contacts should be checked. Anyone with evidence of active lice should be treated at the same time.

Special Precautions

Be aware of populations at risk to chemical exposures! Treatment can be harmful to both those applying the lice treatment shampoo/lotion and those receiving the treatment.

- **If you are pregnant or nursing, do not apply lice treatment to children or use these products on yourself.**
- Do not apply shampoos if you or the children have open sores on hands, neck, or scalp.
- Consult a doctor before applying shampoos to children with medical conditions such as asthma, are currently undergoing chemotherapy or have a history of chemotherapy treatment, allergies, or epilepsy.

***Children under 2 years of age and at-risk children (listed above) should have the bugs and nits manually removed.**

Lice Treatment Shampoos/Lotions

Over-the-counter (OTC: can be purchased without a prescription) lice treatments are not designed to kill bugs immediately. Bug death may take 24-48 hours after treatment. Lice treatments work differently; some work on dry hair and some on wet hair. The length of time the shampoo is on the hair is important. Follow package directions or your medical provider's advice carefully.

- Do not use a hair conditioner before the treatment.
- Do not rewash the hair for 24-48 hours after the treatment. When using lice shampoos, avoid using a conditioner for 2-3 days after the treatment to allow for the nit killing properties of the shampoo to work properly.
- Bottles of lice shampoo are designed for a single use. Hair must be completely wet with the shampoo or lotion. Long hair may require two bottles to thoroughly cover the hair.
- The OTC lice shampoos or lotions may be repeated ONCE 9 days after the first treatment. Do not use these special shampoos or lotions more frequently. OTC treatments should not be used more than three times in your effort to control the lice. Prescription treatments should not be repeated unless advised to do so by a medical professional.
- Use shampoos or lotions over the sink, not the shower or tub, to prevent entire body from exposure to the chemicals.
- Protect the eyes from exposure to the treatment.
- When rinsing the shampoo or lotion, use cool water to minimize absorption of the chemical by the skin.
- After the lice treatment, change into clean clothing.
- Many lice treatments contain alcohol and may sting open sores that are caused from scratching.
- Some shampoos are highly flammable. Avoid smoking and open flames when using these products!

Nit Removal

RULE #2
Removal of nits immediately after treatment is not necessary to prevent spread because only live lice can cause an infestation.

Removal of nits right after treatment with lice killing shampoo or lotion may be done for cosmetic reasons or to decrease the chance of misdiagnosis. Because none of the lice treatments kill the eggs 100%, manually removing the nits (especially the ones with in ¼ inch of the scalp) after treatment with any product is sometimes recommended.

- Nit combs, often found in lice medicine packages, should be used to comb nits and lice from the hair shaft.
- Wet hair and a fresh haircut make nit combing easier.
- Nit-pick near a good light source and concentrate behind the ears and the nape of the neck.
- Make sure child is in a comfortable position, well rested and fed. Take frequent breaks and entertain the child with a book or movie.
- Divide hair into sections and use a small 1/8 inch section of hair to comb through at a time.
- Products that claim to "loosen" the eggs from the hair shaft are not effective and not recommended.