

HEAD LICE FACT SHEET

What are head lice?

Head lice (also known as "head louse") are small insects that live in people's hair and feed on their blood. Lice glue their eggs (also known as "nits") to hair so they cannot be brushed or shaken off easily. Lice eggs take about six to nine days to hatch. After they have hatched they take about seven or more days to become egg-laying adults. Lice die very quickly (usually about two days) without feeding and cannot live for very long away from a person's head.

What are the symptoms of a head lice infestation?

Head lice can colonize a person's head and cause an infestation. Signs and symptoms of an infestation include:

- Itchiness of the head, neck and ears
- small, red bumps on the scalp, neck and shoulders
- tiny white specks (the eggs or nits) on the bottom of each hair shaft that are hard to remove

Head lice infestation is **often asymptomatic**.

Who can get head lice?

Any human with hair can get a head lice infestation.

What is the treatment for a head lice infestation?

Contact a physician for treatment of a child under the age of 2. For individuals over the age of 2, there are several available treatments for head lice infestations, some of which are:

Nit combing and removal

- Nit combs can be purchased at your local pharmacy.
- Comb hair with a nit comb every day for about two weeks.
- Nits that cannot be removed with a comb can be picked out with your fingernails or tweezers.

Over-the-counter head lice treatments from a pharmacy

- These treatments involve using products to wash and treat the hair which kill the lice and nits.

For more information and details on treatment, visit
<http://www.cdc.gov/parasites/lice/head/treatment.html>

Treatments that have not been proven to be effective:

- Vinegar
- Compounds that say they dissolve the glue on the nits "to ease their removal"
- Mayonnaise
- Olive oil
- Tea tree oil
- Lotions that "suffocate" lice

How are head lice spread?

Head-to-head contact with an infested person is the most common way to get head lice.

Head-to-head contact is common:

- During play at school
- At home
- During sports activities
- At the playground
- At slumber parties

It is also possible, although uncommon, to get head lice through sharing items that may be infested with lice such as:

- Clothing (hats, scarves)
- Hair accessories (combs, brushes, ribbons, ties)
- Towels
- Bed
- Pillow
- Carpet
- Couch

Dogs, cats, and other pets do not play a role in the spread of head lice.

How are head lice infestations prevented; how is its spread prevented?

There are practices that you can take to get rid of head lice or nits remaining in your home:

- Wash clothing and bedding in hot water for at least 20 minutes.
- Seal items that may have been infested in bags for two weeks (to stop the lice from feeding).
- Boil or soak the following in rubbing alcohol: combs, brushes, and hair accessories.
- Vacuum carpets and furniture.
- Fellow household member of the lice-infested child should have their scalp examined.

Do I need to remove my child from school?

In the event that your child may have a head lice infestation you should inform the school nurse or administration. Schools and child care facilities have varying rules about whether your child will be able to attend while infested with head lice. **California Department of Public Health recommends a no live lice policy for schools.**

For more information please contact Contra Costa Public Health at 925-313-6740 and visit our website at <http://cchealth.org/lice/>