



Washington County, Oregon

Head Lice Information

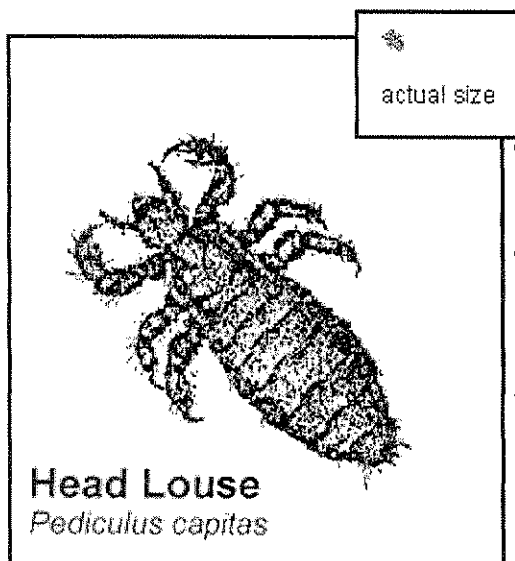
Last Updated: March 3, 1998

Department of Health & Human Services
Community Health Services Division
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Identification



Head lice are found on scalp hairs, especially on the back of the neck and around the ears.

- Their nits (eggs) are glued to individual hairs. Lice are small, they are about 1/16 to 1/8 inch long. Nits are about 1/32 inch long.
- Nits are often the first sign of a head lice infestation. Other indications are; acute itching and very tiny red bite marks behind the ears and on the scalp.
- Head lice are transmitted by close personal contact with an infected person, or by sharing clothing and personal items such as hats, combs, and brushes. Lice cannot jump from person to person, and pets do not get head lice.



Treatment

There are many steps you must take in treating head lice and it is important to do everything very thoroughly.

1. First thoroughly **shampoo the hair** with a shampoo that contains no conditioners or softeners. Hair must be very clean so the insecticide will penetrate. **Then** apply a lice

killing shampoo. Some of these include Nix, RID, A-200, or R&C shampoo. It is important to follow the directions on the shampoo bottle that you purchase. It is also important to use a freshly cleaned towel when you have finished shampooing.

2. It is very important that you **remove all the nits** after shampooing. Nit removal is the most vital step. It is a painstaking, time-consuming, and often frustrating task. The nits do not come off easily: each must be snagged firmly by fingernails, tweezers, or a lice comb, slid down the hair shaft, and removed. Check the head for remaining nits daily for at least 10 days. You may want to **reapply the shampoo** in 7-10 days. Everyone living in the same house needs to be checked for lice. It is advisable to treat everyone.
3. The household also needs to be treated. **Wash all clothing**, bed linens, jackets, scarves, hats, etc. in hot water and dry in a hot clothes dryer for at least 20 minutes.
4. All family **combs and brushes must be treated**, including ones kept in purses and in the car. To treat the combs and brushes, remove all the hair and then heat in water over 150 degrees F for 10 minutes.
5. Carefully **vacuum mattresses**, sofas, chairs, pillows, carpets, car and other furniture that might have been exposed.
6. Ironing with a hot iron is an effective ways to **rid fabrics** of lice: especially material that isn't washable or easily dry cleaned. Seams on bed mattresses can also be ironed with a hot iron to get lice that may crawl into crevices.
7. Personal items, stuffed toys, and clothing that cannot be washed at high temperatures or dry cleaned should be placed in an air tight plastic bag for a minimum of 20 days at room temperature, or 48 hours in the freezer.



Prevention

There are many steps to take to help prevent infestations of lice.

- Do not share combs, brushes, barrettes, hair ribbons, or other personal items.
- Do not share or borrow hats, batting helmets, scarves, pillows, or sleeping bags.
- Hang hats and coats separate from others, not on top of one another.
- Avoid putting heads together with other children, including "reading time" on pillows at school.
- Wash any clothing retrieved from lost and found before wearing.
- Check your child's head frequently.
- Provide each member of the family with personal towels and do not share.



Lice - Symptoms

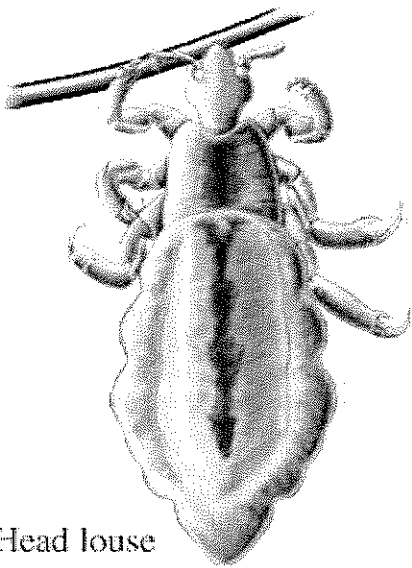
Itching, the most common symptom of all types of lice infestation, is caused by an allergic reaction. Lice bite the skin to feed on a person's blood. The saliva from these bites causes the allergic reaction and itching.

Itching may not occur right away, depending on a person's sensitivity and history of lice infestation. The first time a person is infested with lice, it may take several weeks or months for itching to develop or to be noticed. In a repeat case of lice, a person may begin to itch within 2 days of infestation because the immune system reacts more quickly when exposure has occurred previously.

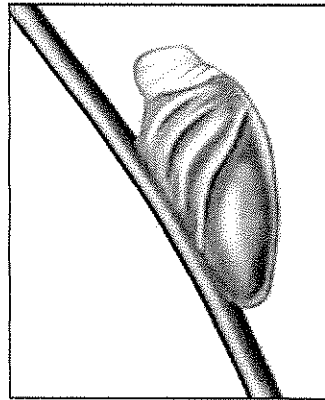
Some people become very sensitive to lice bites and have unbearable itching. Others build up tolerance to the bites and have little or no itching, even with repeated infestations.

In addition to itching, symptoms of lice infestation vary depending on which type of lice is present.

Head lice

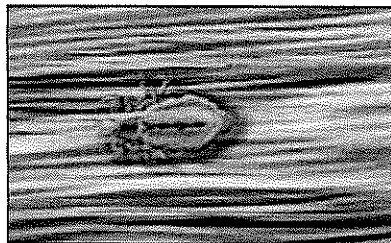
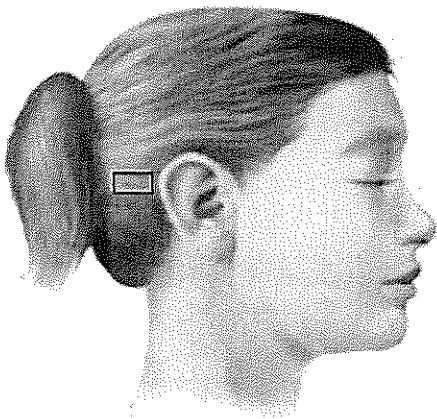


Head louse

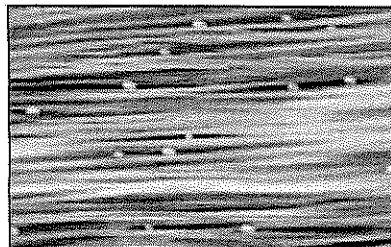


Louse egg (nit) on hair

Head lice: Appearance on hair



Head louse



Louse eggs (nits)

Head lice

Head lice and their eggs (nits) can be seen on hair, the nape of the neck, and behind the ears. They can vary in color from white to brown to dark gray. The eggs are tiny round or oval shapes that are tightly attached to the hair near the scalp and do not slide up and down on the hair.

Frequent scratching may cause broken skin or sores to form on the scalp. The damaged skin may weep clear fluid or crust over, and it may become infected. In response to infection, the lymph nodes behind the ears and in the neck may become tender and swollen.

Lice - Prevention

Head lice can affect people of any income or social level. It is very difficult to prevent lice from spreading among children because they commonly share hats, combs, and other items. Frequently examining the scalps of your school-age children may help you discover and treat lice before they spread to the rest of your family. Avoiding prolonged close contact with a person who has lice will also reduce your risk.

Lice - Other Places To Get Help

Online Resource

KidsHealth for Parents, Children, and Teens

Nemours Foundation

Web Address: www.kidshealth.org

This Web site provides a wide range of information about children's health, from allergies and diseases to normal growth and development (birth to adolescence). This Web site offers separate areas for kids, teens, and parents, each providing age-appropriate information that the child or parent can understand. You can sign up to get weekly emails about your area of interest.

Organizations

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

1600 Clifton Road
Atlanta, GA 30333

Phone: 1-800-311-3435
(404) 498-1515, for public inquiries

E-mail: cdcinfo@cdc.gov

Web Address: www.cdc.gov

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is an agency of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, working with state and local health officials and the public in the fight against communicable diseases and cancer. The agency provides information to the public about disease prevention and treatment.