

How do I keep my home free of lice?

Wash and dry everything possible to kill the lice and nits. For items that cannot be washed, soaking these items in very hot, soapy water for 10 minutes or vacuuming are effective in killing lice and nits as well.

Items to remember to wash and clean:

- bed linens, including pillows
- sleeping bags
- hats, caps, headbands, ear-phones
- scarves and stuffed toys
- furniture fabric, rugs, and car seats
- combs and brushes (make sure that all hairs are removed and destroyed)

Fumigation is not needed to kill head lice

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How can I avoid getting head lice?

Do not share combs and brushes or other types of headwear, such as hats, headbands or earphones. Keep hats, caps and coats on hangers and separate.

Treat infested persons right away with medicated shampoo when head lice are detected. Treat again in seven to ten days. Check daily for two weeks after treatment to detect reinfestation quickly.

Keep your home louse-free. Check all members in the household for lice and nits weekly if there have been cases at school or among friends.

Teach children in group situations such as families and classrooms about lice and to follow the steps outlined here to prevent spread of lice.

For more information contact:
your doctor or nurse
your local health department

Department of Human Services
Oregon Public Health Division
Acute & Communicable Disease Prevention
971- 673-1111

HEAD LICE

Questions and Answers

Head lice are small, wingless insects that live on the human head and suck blood. Their normal color is grayish-white, but they turn reddish-brown after a meal. Head lice lay eggs in clumps that attach to individual hairs. These egg clusters are called nits.

Nits are yellowish and even smaller than the adult louse. The egg is firmly attached to hair with a glue-like liquid from the louse. Freshly laid eggs are usually close to the base of the hair.



Acute and Communicable Disease Prevention

Where are head lice found?

Head lice are found on the scalp (skin on the top of the head) hairs, especially on the back of the neck and around the ears. Their nits are glued to single hairs, close to the scalp. Head lice are neither found, nor can they live on animals, such as cats or dogs.

What are the signs of head louse infestation?

Intense itching and very tiny red bite marks behind the ears and on the scalp, with most appearing at the back of the neck, are signs that you have head lice. The easiest way to know if you have head lice is to look for nits attached to hairs. Flecks of dandruff, leftover dried shampoo, hairspray or other material may be mistaken for nits unless closely examined.

What do the nits of head lice look like?

Nits are yellowish, oval and about 0.8 mm (1/32 of an inch) long. One end is slightly flattened and has a cap, much like a cork in a bottle. The egg is firmly attached to a hair with a glue-like liquid from the louse. The cap of the egg points away from the hair at about a 30-degree angle. Freshly laid eggs are usually close to the scalp.

Do head lice spread disease?

No. Unlike body lice, head lice have not been shown to spread diseases. However, if left untreated they may lead to infections from scratching the irritated scalp.

How are head lice spread?

Head lice are spread by direct person-to-person contact, or indirectly, by sharing things such as combs, headwear or bath towels; by placing hats and coats together, or by any other exchange or contact of personal items that touch the head.

Can lice jump from one person to another?

Lice cannot jump. They can only reach out and grasp a hair or piece of fiber and pull themselves on to it. If they fall off the head and on to a smooth surface, they can crawl.

How do you get rid of head lice?

When one person in a household is found to have head lice, everyone living in the house should be checked for lice. A doctor or pharmacist can explain the over-the-counter medicine for treatment. Such "pediculocide" products include "NIX®" or "RID®."

Treatment success depends on following product directions. Before treatment, wash hair with a shampoo that does not have any conditioners to remove all oil and other haircare products from the hair. Apply the treatment product on either wet or dry hair, following package directions.

After treatment, remove all live lice and nits found with a specially made fine-toothed lice comb, tweezers, or your fingers and fingernails. Hair should be carefully combed, small section by small section, until the entire head has been combed.

What if the treatment doesn't work?

Nymph and adult lice may not die right away after treatment. Check 24 hours later for live lice, and continue to remove nits. If live lice are found after two treatments, seven to ten days apart, change to a different product and treat again.

Some lice are not killed by some products, and none of the products kill all of the nits. Hand-picking of lice and nits from the head is another safe method for removal.

Using products more often than suggested does not make them work better and can be harmful to the skin. Head lice sprays are neither necessary nor suggested.

When should children return to school or day care?

Most schools require children to be "nit free" before they can return, because there is no way to tell live nits from dead ones. Nit removal also helps assure successful treatment. If the nit is removed, it cannot hatch a nymph and begin infestation again.