



Head Lice Fact Sheet

Head lice crawl from person to person by direct head to head contact. They do not spread disease. Anyone can get them. They are more common in children as their heads frequently touch when they play together. Itching is the main complaint. Parents should check their children's hair *weekly* for head lice. Check more often if your child has close contact with someone who has head lice. **Do not send a child with head lice to a school or child care facility until he or she has had *the first of the two* required treatments.**

What to look for:

Lice

- Small, flat, hard to see insects
- About the size of a sesame seed
- Greyish-brown in colour
- Crawling, unable to jump or fly

Eggs (Nits)

- On hair shafts very close to the scalp
- Size of a grain of sand
- Oval in shape
- Glued to the hair (They cannot be washed off with shampoo or flicked off like dandruff or sand)
- Brownish in colour when alive
- Hatch in about seven days
- Nits found *more* than 1 cm. from the scalp are dead or hatched and are whitish in colour

Where to look:

Look for lice or nits close to the scalp, particularly around the ears and at the back of the neck. Use a bright light and a magnifying glass if available. Act quickly if you find them.

How to get rid of head lice:

Check all close contacts.

If one person in the family has head lice, it is possible that other family members will also have them. Tell your child's school, day-care, and children's groups (i.e. sports, Cubs, etc.) so other parents can be notified to check their children's hair. An untreated source among close contacts is a common reason for getting head lice again.

It is important that all individuals who have head lice be treated at the same time.

Consult your doctor about treatment if...

- you are allergic to any of the ingredients
- you are pregnant or breastfeeding
- treating children under two years of age
- treating someone with seizure disorders
- treating lice on eyebrows, eyelashes or beard
- the skin of the scalp is broken or infected
- the head lice infestation persists

Talk to your pharmacist.

Your pharmacist can help you choose a head lice product. You do not need a prescription. Read the list of ingredients and the directions **very carefully**. Nix, R&C, and Kwellada-P are proven effective **when used as directed**.

Give two treatments seven to 10 days apart.

The first treatment will kill head lice but not all of the eggs. Even with careful nit picking some live eggs will be missed. These eggs can continue to hatch over the next week, which is why **all products must be used again in seven to 10 days**.

This will kill the newly hatched lice before they are able to move from head to head and reproduce. If you see live lice 48 hrs after the second treatment, contact your physician.

Nit Removal.

Thorough nit removal is necessary after each treatment. Removing the nits after treatment makes it easier to see a new infestation and is an essential step to getting rid of the head lice. It may also be important for the child's appearance. Children may return to school or child care facility after the first treatment even if nits still remain in their hair.

Short sessions of nit removal over several days may be easier than one long session. Work with small sections of the hair using a bright light. With a fine-toothed nit comb or your fingernails, pull the nits from the hair strands starting from the roots right down to the tips. Wipe the nits onto a tissue, place in a bag for disposal, and wash your hands and the comb with soap and water.

Alternative head lice treatment

The following is an alternative treatment for head lice based on a recommendation by Dr. Moshe Ipp, Hospital for Sick Children, Toronto. It can be used when two treatments with the above products are not effective but not at the same time as the above products.

- Mix a solution of 50 per cent mineral oil (less odour than vegetable oil) and 50 per cent white vinegar.
- Test the mixture for skin sensitivity by applying it to a small patch of skin on the arm and observing it for 15 minutes.
- Soak the hair with solution and cover it with plastic for approximately one hour.
Plastic can cause suffocation. Do not leave your child unattended.

- Thoroughly rinse the hair with several applications of regular shampoo. Do not use conditioner or a shampoo that contains conditioner.
- Make sure the mixture does not get into the eyes. If it does, wash the eyes with plain water for two to five minutes.
- Use a comb soaked in vinegar to remove the nits from the hair shafts.
- This treatment may be repeated whenever necessary as side effects are unlikely.
- The theory is that the vinegar loosens the nits from the hair shaft, and the oil helps with combing out the nits as well as suffocating any live lice that may be present.

Cleaning personal items

Head lice and their nits do not survive long away from the warmth and humidity of the scalp. However, sharing hair brushes while undergoing treatment is discouraged. You should wash combs and brushes, headgear, bed linens and towels in hot water. Extra housecleaning and use of insecticide sprays are not needed.



If you have any questions or would like to receive information on workshops about head lice, call Ottawa Public Health at 613-580-6744 and speak with a Public Health Nurse.