



Head Lice Fact Sheet

How do people get head lice? Lice are almost always spread through direct, head to head contact. Less commonly, they can be spread by sharing brushes, combs, hats, scarves and hoodies. Only adult bugs can spread from one head to the other. Eggs cannot be transmitted.

Can lice live in my home? No, head lice are human parasites that cannot live off the human head for more than 24-48 hours.

Who can get head lice? Anyone can get head lice! A case of head lice has nothing to do with personal hygiene, your home environment, ethnicity or age.

Can my pets get lice? No. Head lice cannot live on animals of any kind. They are human parasites.

Can lice jump or fly? No, head lice don't jump, fly or swim. They have claws and can crawl quickly along the hair shaft. If your hair comes in contact with an infested head, a louse is able to grab onto a strand of hair and make its way to your scalp.

How do I detect head lice? You may be able to see lice or nits (eggs) by parting the child's hair into small sections. They will most commonly be found behind the ears and near the neckline. Nits are small, teardrop-shaped eggs that show up differently depending on hair color.

Lice eggs are often confused with dandruff. Dandruff will not be stuck to the hair and will move if you brush it with your finger or blow on it lightly. Nits are essentially 'glued' to the hair shaft and will not move without being pulled with some force with your fingernail.

Can head lice be prevented? The best way to prevent head lice is for your child to avoid head to head contact during play, sleepovers or other activities at home and school (including selfies!). Wearing hair in tight buns and braids is helpful for girls. Lice have an acute sense of smell, spritzing hair with a preventive spray scented with mint each morning is a good deterrent.

If one of my children has lice, will other family members have it also? Head lice is very contagious. It's recommended that all household members be checked if you suspect someone in your home has lice. About 80% of mothers whose children have lice are also positive.

Do lice shampoos get rid of lice? Lice shampoos are no longer effective at killing lice. Research shows 98% of lice have mutated to become resistant to the most commonly used over-the-counter lice treatments (Rid, Nix). Shampoos also have no effect on lice eggs. Each egg must be manually removed or they will hatch and the cycle will continue.