



## Pediculosis (Head Lice)

### What are lice and nits?

Lice are tiny but visible insects. They live in hair and survive on human blood. The eggs of lice are called nits. They too are very small but visible. Nits are extremely tiny and white, and they cling to the hair. The female louse attaches her eggs to the hairs near the scalp. The eggs hatch and leave empty nit shells on the hair. As lice mature, they begin laying more eggs. It takes seven to 10 days for lice to mature.

### Where do head lice occur?

Lice outbreaks occur worldwide. They are common among young children and their close contacts. They are not related to poor hygiene. Routine hair care will not prevent or cure the problem.

### How are head lice spread?

Lice are spread most of the time by head-to-head contact with a person with head lice or by contact with their personal belongings (such as combs, brushes, coats, hats, bed linens or towels) that have live lice or eggs on them.

### What are the signs of head lice?

Lice and nits, although very small, can be seen in the hair and scalp. Nits may resemble dandruff. Itching of the scalp is very common, but with mild cases children may not complain. Irritation of the skin at the hairline and ears due to scratching may be present.

### Who should be treated?

Treatment is recommended for persons with active infestation. All other household members and close contacts should be monitored but not treated unless lice or nits are found. Bedmates of the person with lice or nits should be treated.

### How are head lice treated?

Medication in the form of shampoo or crème rinse is available both over-the-counter or by prescription. It is very important that medication instructions be followed *exactly* as written. Nit removal is also very important. The best way to remove nits following treatment is to separate hair into small sections and wet comb each section with a fine tooth comb. Clean comb after each section of hair is wet combed. Nits should be placed in a sealed trash bag. Nits can sometimes live through the treatment, then hatch and re-infest. Children may return to school after treatment with a significant amount (75%) of nits removed, however daily combing needs to be continued to remove ALL nits.

If crawling lice are seen after full treatment, consult your health care provider. Retreatment is generally recommended but do not treat an infected person more than two or three times with the same medication if it does not appear to be working. Do not mix lice treatments.

### Other Important notes:

- Pregnant women and children under age 2 should check with their health care providers regarding treatment.
- Children with asthma and allergies should check with their health care provider regarding treatment.
- Excessive use of pesticide products may be harmful.

- Itching or redness of the scalp may occur after using lice medication. Avoid contact with eyes. If shampoo gets in the eyes, immediately flush with water. After use, store product out of reach of children. If problem persists, contact your school nurse, childcare nurse or health care provider.
- No method is 100 percent effective. Remember the most important step in successful treatment is to remove all nits.

**Prevention and control measures in the classroom:**

- Hang or store coats and hats separately using assigned or labeled wall hooks, lockers or cubbies.
- Tuck hats and scarves into coat sleeves.
- Teach students not to share hats, headgear, combs, brushes, bows, etc.
- Avoid “dress-up” time or activities where clothes or hats are shared.
- Vacuum rugs or carpet daily.
- Store sleeping mats or towels in individually student-labeled cubbies or plastic bags. Send these items home frequently for laundering. Store other personal items in plastic or paper bag labeled with students’ names.
- Clean headphones with damp cloth between students.
- Investigate any student scratching his head.
- Examine all classroom contacts if head lice have been confirmed.

**Prevention and control measures at home:**

- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommend removal of lice and nits on household objects:
  1. Machine washing with hot water and detergent (especially bed linens, towels and clothes worn or used by the infected person in the 2-day period just before treatment) followed by drying at a hot temperature.
  2. Items that cannot be washed should be dry cleaned or sealed in plastic bags for two weeks.
  3. Vacuum upholstered furniture, carpeting, mattress, pillows, floors and automobile. Immediately dispose of vacuum cleaner contents in outside trash.
  4. Soak combs and brushes in hot water (at least 130 degrees Fahrenheit) for 5-10 minutes.
- Household lice sprays are not recommended. They can be toxic if inhaled or absorbed through the skin.
- Encourage children and others not to use personal articles belonging to someone else. Continue to inspect hair for lice or nits. Use fine-tooth comb every day for two weeks.

For more information contact the Guilford County Department of Health and Human Services, Public Health Division at 336-641-7777 or [www.myguilford.com](http://www.myguilford.com), or the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention at [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)