

# HEAD LICE

### What Are Head Lice?

Head lice are parasitic insects that feed on human blood. They are found close to the human scalp. **Head lice are not known to spread disease.**

Head lice have three forms:

- **Nits**—nits are lice eggs. They are found at the base of the hair shaft near the scalp. Nits are firmly attached to the hair and very small; they are often confused with dandruff, scabs or hair spray droplets.
- **Nymph**—a nymph is an immature louse that hatches from a nit. A nymph looks like an adult louse, but is smaller.
- **Adult**—a fully grown and developed adult louse is about the size of a sesame seed, has six legs and is tan to grayish-white in color. An adult louse can live about 30 days on a person's head, but will die within one or two days if it falls off a person.

### How Do I Get Head Lice?

Head lice are most common among young children attending child care or elementary school and the household members of infested children. Head lice are spread by direct contact with the hair of an infested person. They cannot hop or fly, so head-to-head contact with someone who already has lice is the greatest risk. Spread by contact with clothing or other personal items, like brushes, combs or towels, used by an infested person is uncommon, but not impossible. Dogs, cats and other pets do not play a role in the spread of head lice. It's also important to note that **personal hygiene or cleanliness in the home or school have nothing to do with getting head lice.**

**For more information on head lice, please contact a Public Health Nurse at City-County Health Department at 454-6950 or visit [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov).**

### How Do I Know If I Have Head Lice?

Someone infested with head lice may experience the following:

- Itching on the head or scalp
- Tickling feeling of something moving in the hair
- Sores on the head caused by scratching

A diagnosis is made when a live nymph or adult louse is found on an individual's scalp or hair. Lice are very small, move quickly and avoid light, so a magnifying lens and fine-toothed comb may be helpful to find them. Finding nits firmly attached to the base of a hair shaft suggests that a person is infested and should be treated.

### How is Head Lice Treated?

Treatment for head lice is recommended for persons diagnosed with an active infestation; household members and other close contacts should be checked for head lice.

### Treating the Infested Person(s)

Treatment requires an over-the-counter or prescription medicine that is applied to the hair and scalp.

- Apply that medicine according to the instructions. Pay special attention to instructions regarding how long the medicine should be left on and how it should be washed out.
- Comb dead and any remaining live lice out of the hair using a fine-toothed nit comb after treatment. Combing with the nit comb every 2-3 days may help decrease the chance of reinfestation.
- Continue to check for 2-3 weeks to be sure all lice and nits are gone.

Retreatment may be required depending on the medicine used and how well the first treatment worked. Speak with your health care provider before retreating.

### Supplemental Measures

Some simple measures can be taken to avoid reinfestation.

- Machine wash and dry clothing, bed linens and other items the infested person wore or used during the two days prior to treatment on the hottest setting possible. Clothing and items that are not washable can be dry cleaned or sealed in a plastic bag and stored for two weeks.
- Soak combs and brushes in hot water (130°F) for 5-10 minutes.
- Vacuum the floor and furniture, particularly where the infested person sat or lay.



*CCHD does not require reporting of head lice infestation, but it may be beneficial for the sake of others to share information with school nurses, child care providers and other about contact with head lice.*