



HEALTHY SCHOOLS FOR HEALTHY KIDS

HEAD LICE | Fast Facts & Treatment Tips

NCAP works to protect community and environmental health and inspire the use of ecologically sound solutions to reduce the use of pesticides. We work directly with farmers, schools, parks and cities that seek to end their reliance on pesticides.

WHAT ARE HEAD LICE?



Head lice (*Pediculus humanus capitis*) are easily shared—but essentially harmless—parasitic insects. These microscopic insects live in your hair, close to your scalp. Head lice must feed off another living body in order to survive. Their source of food is human blood, which they get from your scalp. Head lice can't jump, fly, swim or live in water apart from their host. In fact, they cling to hair strands for dear life when you bathe.

It's important to remember that head lice do not transmit diseases. Head lice can be a problem in any community and do not reflect poor hygiene or social status. Children are no longer required to stay home from school until 'nit free.' Lice are not transmitted from pets to humans and they are unable to survive away from a human host for more than about 48 hours. Eradicating lice is not a quick fix. No pesticide treatment of a classroom or school bus is necessary or beneficial. In any school classroom a 1% head lice incidence is normal.¹

DETECTION & SYMPTOMS



Itchy: The most common symptom of lice is itching. Their bites cause an allergic reaction that provokes the itch.



Movement: The head louse is a nocturnal creature and is more active in the dark than during the day. You may feel a ticklish sensation when going to sleep.



Visual inspection: Head lice are small and can be difficult to spot with the naked eye. A bright light and a magnifying glass are useful tools to aid in the detection.



What to look for: Eggs, or nits, will look like tiny white dots attached to hair follicles near the scalp. Part the hair with a comb to look for nits.

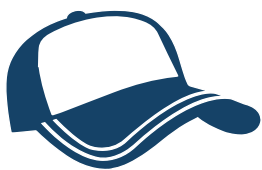
Early detection of individual lice is far easier to deal with than an advanced infestation.

What parents can do: Throughout the school year parents should inspect children weekly. If possible try to set up a regular routine. It shouldn't take more than a few minutes even if your child has thick hair.

What schools can do: Train school health personnel on how to perform proper early detection. Send home notices to the entire class if a child has been found with lice and encourage non-chemical treatment and prevention.

¹ <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2724133/>

PREVENTION



Sharing is one of the most important lessons we learn during childhood. Unfortunately, sharing certain items can lead to the transmission of head lice. The most common way for children to come in contact with head lice is through head-to-head contact, but lice can be spread by sharing hats, combs and brushes, sleeping bags, stuffed animals, clothing and even helmets.

What parents can do: Talking to your children about not sharing these items with others can go a long way to prevent your child from getting head lice. Keep long hair tied back during the school day. Avoid sharing brushes and combs at home.

What schools can do: Lice can travel from one child's jacket to another. Have children store their jackets and scarves inside their backpacks or in cubbies, or hang them on hooks that are far enough apart that clothing isn't touching.

NON-TOXIC AND LEAST TOXIC TREATMENT

Many parents still turn to harmful synthetic pesticides, when simple steps can remove lice; there are proven pesticide-free techniques that will protect your family.

Due to the severe health and environmental risk, several pesticides (DDT, chlordane, organochlorine) once used to eradicate lice have been banned in the United States. California has banned lindane for treatment, but the FDA still permits its use for treatment of head lice despite the risks of seizures, headaches and even brain damageⁱ. Plus, up to 30% of adult lice can survive lice shampooing and pesticide-resistant 'super lice'ⁱⁱ have arisen as a result of pyrethrin and other chemicals.

There is some evidence that heat treatments with a hairdryer or Lousebusterⁱⁱⁱ will kill adult lice, and 8-hour leave in treatments of petroleum jelly or mayonnaise can suffocate lice. Benzyl alcohol or enzyme treatments have also been studied but there are limited published studies on the safety or efficacy. Combing has been proven to be the most effective with the least side effects. No treatments kill all lice.

Special fine-toothed metal combs are needed to remove lice. They are effective if thorough combing is done every day for up to two weeks to ensure that all freshly hatched and surviving lice are removed. These can be found at your local drugstore or ordered from the National Pediculosis Association (<http://www.headlice.org/> or by phone at 1-800-446-4NPA). Some areas have professional brushing services that are fast and effective. Check the internet to see if services are available near you.

Proper Lice Combing Procedure^{iv, v}

1. Pull back your own hair before combing the hair of others! Brush in a well-lit area.
2. Apply vegetable or coconut oil to your child's hair to loosen the nits. Do not use conditioner prior to treatment.
3. Brush hair with a large-toothed regular comb and separate into 1/2 to 3/4-inch sections.
4. Starting at the scalp, slowly comb through each section of hair several times with a metal lice comb.
5. Each time you comb out lice or nits, dunk the comb into a bowl of soapy water. Frequently remove hair and other debris from the comb with a tissue and discard.
6. Shampoo twice to remove the oil. Let hair dry, and recheck for stray nits clinging to the hair shaft. Flush the soapy water down the toilet.
7. Soak the comb and scissors for 5-10 minutes in hot soapy water, or boil in plain water for 5 to 10 minutes. Do this with all the hairbrushes and combs for the family.
8. Wash towels in hot water and dry on high heat. Wash all bedding, hair ties, hats, coats used in the last 2 days. Vacuum car seat covers, floors and furniture where anyone with head lice has recently spent time.



i <http://www.fda.gov/drugs/drugsafety/postmarketdrugsafetyinformationforpatientsandproviders/ucm110848.htm>

ii Shamus, Kristen Jordan, 2014. "Hard to kill super lice are resistant to many chemicals", Detroit Free Press/USA Today. March 9, 2014.

iii Goates BM, et al. An effective nonchemical treatment for head lice: a lot of hot air. Pediatrics. November 2006;118;1962-70.

iv Combing steps taken from the EPA's "IPM for schools: A how-to manual." Document #909-B-97-001. March 1997.

v Combing and cleaning steps taken from CDC's Fact Sheet: http://www.cdc.gov/parasites/lice/head/gen_info/faqs.html

Please share this information with parents, students, teachers and school employees to help minimize and prevent the spread of head lice. This project was supported by a grant from the Bullitt Foundation. Please contact NCAP for resources to eliminate the risk from pesticides used at schools.