

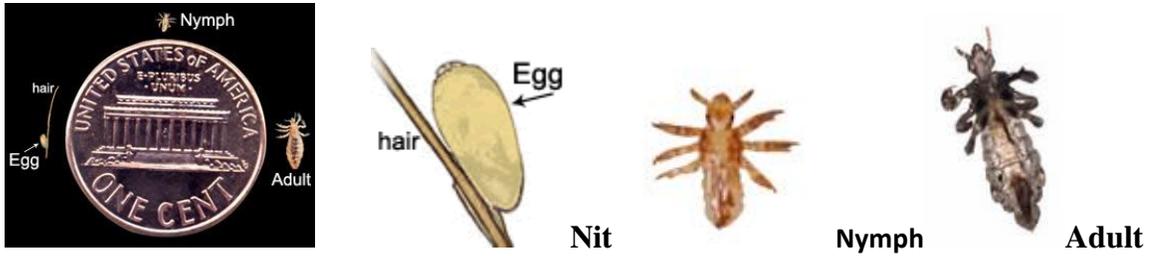
Posey County Health Department  
100 Vista Drive  
Mount Vernon, IN 47620  
Phone: 812-838-1330

## HEAD LICE GUIDE

### 1. What are head lice and what do they look like?

Head lice (louse) are parasitic insects that feed on human blood, live on the human scalp and occasionally on the eyebrows or eyelashes. They are not known to spread disease.

**Head lice DO NOT jump or fly. They DO crawl quickly.**



Pictures from CDC website: [http://www.cdc.gov/parasites/lice/head/gen\\_info/faqs.html](http://www.cdc.gov/parasites/lice/head/gen_info/faqs.html)

There are three stages in the life of lice: the nit (aka egg), the nymph, and the adult.

The nits (or eggs) are laid at the base of the hair shaft nearest the scalp by the female adult louse. **Nits are normally found above and behind the ears and on the back of the head and neck.** *Nits are oval shaped, about the size of a knot in a thread, and can be hard to see without a good light source.* They are often confused with dandruff, scabs, dirt particles, and hair care products which are easily flicked from the hair. **Remember that nits are firmly attached to the hair shaft and difficult to remove.** Nits hatch in 8-9 days.

The nymph (young head lice) can only survive by feeding on human blood every few hours. Nymphs mature into the adult form in 9-12 days.

**The adult is about the size of a sesame seed, has six legs and is tan or grayish-white in color.** The adult must feed on blood several times a day to survive. The female adult louse will lay 4-6 eggs per day. The adult louse lives approximately 20-30 days.

### 2. Who is at risk to get head lice?

In the United States preschool-age children that attend childcare centers, school-aged children, and the household members of infested children are at the highest risk. Head lice have difficulty attaching to the hair shaft of African American people more than other races.

**Head lice are spread through direct contact with an infested person's hair (i.e. head-to-head contact).** It is less likely to be spread by sharing clothing, linens, or personal hygiene items with an infested person. The adult louse can only live about 24-48 hours away from a human host and the nits can only live 10 days but will be unable to hatch at room temperature or below.

### 3. What are the signs and symptoms of a head lice infestation?

Itching, caused by an allergic reaction to the bite wound on the scalp.  
Feeling that something is moving or crawling in the hair.  
Difficulty sleeping. Head lice are more active in the dark.

Sores on the head from scratching may lead to a secondary bacterial infection.

**4. How is head lice diagnosed?**

Finding a live nymph or adult louse. They move quickly and avoid light. You need a bright light, fine-toothed comb and a magnifying lens if possible. Finding attached nits within ¼” of base of the hair shaft could indicate an active infection/infestation. Nits further away than ¼” could be hatched or dead. If there is any doubt, check with a healthcare professional.

**5. How is head lice treated?**

Head lice is treated with Over-the-Counter (OTC) or prescription products. Use as directed.

**Per the CDC:** <http://www.cdc.gov/parasites/lice/head/treatment.html>

**WARNING!**

**Do not use a combination shampoo/conditioner, or conditioner before using lice medicine. Do not re-wash the hair for 1–2 days after the lice medicine is removed.**

**A.** Before applying treatment, it may be helpful to remove clothing that can become wet or stained during treatment.

**B.** Apply lice medicine, also called pediculicide, according to the instructions contained in the box or printed on the label. If the infested person has very long hair (longer than shoulder length), it may be necessary to use a second bottle. Pay special attention to instructions on the label or in the box regarding how long the medication should be left on the hair and how it should be washed out.

**C.** Have the infested person put on clean clothing after treatment.

**D.** If a few live lice are still found 8–12 hours after treatment, but are moving more slowly than before, do not retreat. The medicine may take longer to kill all the lice. Comb dead and any remaining live lice out of the hair using a fine-toothed nit comb.

**E.** If, after 8–12 hours of treatment, no dead lice are found and lice seem as active as before, the medicine may not be working. Do not retreat until speaking with your health care provider; a different pediculicide may be necessary. If your health care provider recommends a different pediculicide, carefully follow the treatment instructions contained in the box or printed on the label.

**F.** Nit (head lice egg) combs, often found in lice medicine packages, should be used to comb nits and lice from the hair shaft. Many flea combs made for cats and dogs are also effective.

**G.** After each treatment, checking the hair and combing with a nit comb to remove nits and lice every 2–3 days may decrease the chance of self-reinfestation. Continue to check for 2–3 weeks to be sure all lice and nits are gone. Nit removal is not needed when treating with spinosad topical suspension.

**H.** Retreatment is meant to kill any surviving hatched lice before they produce new eggs. For some drugs, retreatment is recommended routinely about a week after the first treatment (7–9 days, depending on the drug) and for others only if crawling lice are seen during this period. Retreatment with lindane shampoo is not recommended.

**6. What are the side effects of treatment?**

Some treatments may cause a mild irritation or burning sensation to the scalp. All lice treatment should be used as directed.

**7. What do I do about household items and linens?**

**Remember that head lice cannot survive long if they fall off their human host and cannot feed.** Adult head lice will die within 48 hours and nits won't be able to hatch in 10 days at room temperature or below.

- A. Machine wash and dry clothing, linens, stuffed animals etc. the infested person wore or used 2 days before treatment using hot water and dry on the high heat setting. Dry in dryer for 20 minutes on high heat setting: comforter, pillows, coats, hats, blankets, and other items that cannot be washed. Dry-clean items that cannot be washed. (You may seal items in an air tight plastic bag for 2 weeks).
- B. Soak combs and brushes in hot water (at least 130° F) for 5-10 minutes. Heat may damage items.
- C. Vacuum the floor, furniture, car interior, car seat (if applicable), and other fabric covered items, especially where the infested person sat or lay. Seal up and throw vacuum cleaner bags out immediately.
- D. DO NOT use insecticidal sprays and fumigants. They can be toxic if inhaled or absorbed through the skin.

**8. Who else needs to be treated?**

Household members, close associates, and contacts should be checked. Those persons with signs of active infestation should be treated. Some physicians recommend prophylactic treatment of those who share a bed with an actively infested person. All infested people should be treated at the same time.

**9. Do my pets need to be treated too?**

No. Head lice do not live on pets.

**10. What can I do to prevent head lice?**

**Per the CDC:** <http://www.cdc.gov/parasites/lice/head/prevent.html>

Head lice are spread most commonly by direct head-to-head (hair-to-hair) contact. However, much less frequently they are spread by sharing clothing or belongings onto which lice have crawled or nits attached to shed hairs may have fallen. The risk of getting infested by a louse that has fallen onto a carpet or furniture is very small. Head lice survive less than 1–2 days if they fall off a person and cannot feed; nits cannot hatch and usually die within a week if they are not kept at the same temperature as that found close to the scalp.

The following are steps that can be taken to help prevent and control the spread of head lice:

- Avoid head-to-head (hair-to-hair) contact during play and other activities at home, school, and elsewhere (sports activities, playground, slumber parties, camp).
- Do not share clothing such as hats, scarves, coats, sports uniforms, hair ribbons, or barrettes.
- Do not share combs, brushes, or towels. Disinfest combs and brushes used by an infested person by soaking them in hot water (at least 130°F) for 5–10 minutes.
- Do not lie on beds, couches, pillows, carpets, or stuffed animals that have recently been in contact with an infested person.
- Machine wash and dry clothing, bed linens, and other items that an infested person wore or used during the 2 days before treatment using the hot water (130°F) laundry cycle and the high heat drying cycle. Clothing and items that are not washable can be dry-cleaned OR sealed in a plastic bag and stored for 2 weeks.
- Vacuum the floor and furniture, particularly where the infested person sat or lay. However, spending much time and money on housecleaning activities is not necessary to avoid reinfestation by lice or nits that may have fallen off the head or crawled onto furniture or clothing.
- Do not use fumigant sprays or fogs; they are not necessary to control head lice and can be toxic if inhaled or absorbed through the skin.

To help control a head lice outbreak in a community, school, or camp, children can be taught to avoid activities that may spread head lice.

