

Head Lice Fact Sheet

What are lice?	Lice are tiny, wingless, parasitic insects that live on a person's scalp and feed on their blood. About the size of a sesame seed, lice lay eggs called nits, which they glue to hairs, close to the scalp.
What are symptoms of head lice?	● Itching ● A tickling feeling or a sensation that something is moving in hair ● Sores on the head caused by scratching
How do you check for lice?	Regular checks for head lice are a good way to spot head lice before they have time to multiply and infest (are present in large numbers) your child's head. ● Seat your child in a brightly lit room. ● Part their hair. ● Look for crawling lice and for nits on your child's scalp a section at a time. ● Live lice are hard to find. They avoid light and move quickly. ● Nits will look like small white or yellow-brown specks and be firmly attached to the hair near the scalp. The easiest place to find them is at the hairline at the back of the neck or behind the ears. Nits can be confused with many other things such as dandruff, dirt particles or hair spray droplets. The way to tell the difference is that nits are firmly attached to hair, while dandruff, dirt or other particles are not. ● Use a fine-tooth comb (such as a louse or nit comb) to help you search the scalp section by section.
How are head lice spread?	● Head lice are mainly spread by direct head-to-head contact with a person who has head lice. ● Head lice move by crawling; they cannot hop or fly.
How do you reduce your child's risk?	● Avoid head-to-head (hair-to-hair) contact during play and other activities at home, school, and elsewhere (sports activities, playground, slumber parties, camp). ● Encourage your child not to share items that touch the head, like hairbrushes, hair ribbons, pillows, and hats.
How is head lice treated?	● Kill the insects: Apply an over-the-counter or prescription medication that will kill lice and nits. Follow the instructions on the label. Comb dead and any remaining live lice out of the hair using a fine-toothed nit comb. ● Check the hair of family members and close contacts, like babysitters and your child's close friends, for head lice. Keep checking family members for two weeks to be sure the lice are gone. ● Clean any items your child has worn or used in the past 48 hours. Machine wash clothes and bedding in hot water and dry on high heat. Place items that cannot be machine washed in a hot dryer and run the dryer on the hottest setting for 20 to 30 minutes. ● If you cannot wash or dry items (such as hair accessories, helmets, headphones) seal them in a plastic bag and store them for two weeks. ● Soak combs and brushes that a person with head lice used. Soak these in hot water, 130 degrees Fahrenheit or hotter, for 10 minutes. ● Vacuum carpet and furniture.
How common is head lice?	Each year, an estimated 6 to 12 million infestations occur in the United States among children 3-11 years of age.

Relevant Sources

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; American Academy of Pediatrics; American Academy of Dermatology; American Academy of Family Physicians; Connecticut State Department of Health