

Head Lice

Dear Parent or Guardian,

You are being provided with this fact sheet:

- Because you or your child may have been exposed to head lice.
 - For informational purposes only.
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General Information About Head Lice

What are head lice?

- Head lice are reddish-brown parasitic insects about the size of a sesame seed.
- They live and lay their eggs (nits) on hair close to the scalp.
- A single insect is called a “louse”. There are three stages in the lifespan of a louse including the nit (egg), nymph (young adult), and adult stage.
- The life cycle of a louse is 25 to 30 days; it takes about ten days for a newborn louse to become an adult. One adult female louse can lay 6 to 8 nits a day for up to 10 days.
- Lice do not carry disease and they do not live on pets or other animals.

Who can get it?

- Anyone can get head lice, even if they have had it before.
- Personal hygiene or cleanliness in the home or school has nothing to do with getting head lice.
- It is most common in preschool children because they are playing closer to their peers than younger children.
- Some studies suggest that girls get head lice more often than boys, likely because they have more frequent head-to-head contact.

What are the symptoms?

- Itching from the body’s reaction to louse bites.
- Sores from scratching the head.
- A sense of something moving in the hair.
- Trouble sleeping because head lice are more active in the dark.
- In some cases, there are no symptoms.

How is it spread?

- Lice can crawl from one person’s head to another. They do not fly or jump from one person to another.
 - Most often, lice are spread by direct head-to-head contact with a person who has lice.
 - There is also a possibility that lice may spread when a person with lice shares items like coats, hats, helmets, pillow, brushes, and other personal items, or when these personal items come in direct contact during storage.
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How Do I Check to See If My Child Has Head Lice?

- Carefully inspect hair with a bright light and a magnifying glass.

- Nits can be a variety of colors including clear, white, yellowish, brown, or gray and are oval in shape.
 - They are usually close to the scalp around the ears and along the hairline at the neck.
 - They feel like little grains of sand on the hair.
 - If you are unsure if your child has head lice, or you have additional questions, contact your healthcare provider.
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What If My Child Has Head Lice?

Notify your child care provider or preschool immediately if your child has head lice.

How is it treated?

- Head lice treatments are available for purchase over-the-counter and by prescription.
- Only live lice can cause an infestation; the treatments work by killing the live lice.
- **Carefully follow the package directions.**
- Because of the lice's life cycle, you may need to repeat treatment 7-9 days after the first treatment. Please make sure you follow the package directions.
- Nonchemical treatments exist, including removing lice and nits from wet hair using a fine-toothed comb either alone or with a product that prevents lice from breathing or moving.
- Consult with your health care provider for treatment recommendations, especially if you are pregnant or breastfeeding, or if the child is under 2 years of age.

How can I help prevent head lice from spreading?

- Avoid head-to-head contact with individuals who have head lice.
 - Do not share hats, combs, coats, helmets, pillows, or other personal items.
 - Keep long hair pulled back.
 - You only need to clean items that have been in contact with your child's head in the 24-48 hours before they started treatment.
 - Wash sheets, pillowcases, hats, and clothing using hot (130°F) water and dry on a high heat cycle.
 - Soak brushes, combs, and hair accessories in hot water (at least 130°F) for 5–10 minutes.
 - Vacuum the floor, furniture, and car seat. Throw the vacuum bag away or empty the vacuum canister in an outside garbage container after vacuuming.
 - Items that cannot be washed can be:
 - run in the dryer on the "hot" setting for 30 minutes,
 - sealed in a plastic bag for one to two weeks, or
 - dry cleaned.
 - Treating the environment with chemicals (such as fumigation) is not recommended.
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Does My Child Need to Stay Home from Child Care?

According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, children can return to child care after receiving their first lice treatment.

Please follow your child care program's sickness policy.

References:

American Academy of Pediatrics

- *Caring For Our Children, Chapter 7: Infectious Diseases, 7.5 Skin and Mucous Membrane Infections, 7.5.8 Pediculosis Capitis (Head Lice)*
- *Managing Infectious Diseases in Child Care and Schools, 5th Edition. Pages 115-117*

Centers for Disease Control & Prevention

- *Parasites (headlice). <https://www.cdc.gov/parasites/lice/head/>*

Child Care Health Program – Public Health Seattle & King County

- <https://kingcounty.gov/depts/health/child-teen-health/child-care-health/disease-prevention.aspx>