

Pediculosis (Head Lice)

What is Pediculosis (head lice)?

Head Lice (Pediculosis) are common in school-aged children, particularly children ages 3-11. Head lice are not known to transmit disease and aren't a significant health risk, but are more of a nuisance and can be persistent. They are tiny wingless insects that live close to a human scalp and they feed on human blood. The lice lay tiny eggs called nits on strands of hair about $\frac{1}{4}$ inch from the scalp, commonly found at the base of the neck and behind the ears. They move by crawling fast and cannot jump or fly. The most common mode of transmission is through direct head-to-head contact while children are playing. Transmission by contact with personal items (ie. hairbrushes, combs, hair ties, hats, clothing, pillows, car seats, & bedding) are less common as lice can only live a short amount of time (24-48 hours) off the host. Lice do not live on pets and they do not carry lice.



Personal hygiene, and household and school cleanliness are not the cause of head lice. The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), the National Association of School Nurses (NASN), the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), and the Massachusetts Department of Public Health do not recommend children be excluded from school for head lice or nits. The burden of excessive absenteeism outweighs the risk of head lice. The AAP further recommends that upon discovery of a healthy child with an active head lice infestation in the school setting, the child should remain in school for the rest of the day. Confidentiality must be maintained and the parents/ guardians should be notified and educated on proper treatment of head lice. The child should be allowed back to school after proper treatment.

What happens if my student is found to have head lice at school?

Any student who is identified by the school nurse with live lice or nits may remain in school until the end of the day. The student may return to school after initial treatment and follow-up examination by the school nurse.

What is the recommended treatment for head lice?

Treatment is highly encouraged before your child returns to school. Household members should be examined and treated simultaneously. The following treatments are recommended.

- Contact your child's pediatrician and use lice treatment that is recommended. Treatment of head lice typically includes an over-the-counter (OTC) shampoo/cream specifically labeled for lice treatment that contains one of the following ingredients: *permethrin*, *pyrethrin*, *ivermectin* & *malathion*. Use any of the products very carefully and follow the instructions specifically. In some cases, the OTC treatments fail to remove live lice and a prescription treatment will need to be provided by your child's pediatrician. Do not use any insecticide or other chemicals not specifically labeled for the use of head lice on humans. There is no scientific evidence that supports home remedies as effective treatments for head lice.
- After treatment, use a fine-toothed metal nit-removing comb daily for 10 days to remove nits from your child's hair. Inspect your child's hair section by section using a bright light and magnifier if needed. Nits tend to be located behind the ears and at the base of the neck. Most lice treatments recommend reapplication 7-10 days after initial treatment.
- 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.
- Change the pillowcase of your child daily.

- Soak combs and brushes in **hot** (128.3°F/53.5°C) water for 5 minutes.
- Thoroughly vacuum rugs, upholstered furniture, and mattresses.

How can I prevent my student from getting head lice?

Head lice are mostly spread by direct head-to-head contact. They do not jump or fly and are less likely to spread through personal belongings such as hair brushes, hats, clothes, and linen. Pets do not spread head lice.

- Encourage your child not to share personal items such as hair brushes, hair accessories, hats, clothes, etc.
- Reduce head to head contact with other children, if possible.