

# Head Lice

Head lice are tiny bugs about the size of a sesame seed. They live in the hair and bite the scalp to suck blood. They do not fly or jump, but they can move very fast. This makes it hard to find them in the hair.

Nits are the eggs of the lice. They look like yellowish, white, or brown dandruff. Head lice attach their eggs to shafts of hair with a waterproof “glue”. The eggs are laid close to the scalp. Look for eggs at the back of the neck and behind the ears. These eggs cannot be washed out or brushed out of the hair. They must be picked out one at a time.

## Causes

Lice can spread quickly from one person to another if the persons:

- Share hats, scarves, combs, brushes, hair clips or barrettes, hair bands, helmets or clothing
- Lie on the same bed, couch, or carpet
- Play close together
- Use items stored in closets or lockers that have the lice or eggs on them

## Signs

- Itching or tickling feeling that something is moving around or tickling the head.
- Red marks or sores on the scalp sometimes with drainage and crusting. These are often found behind the ears or on the back of the neck. If the skin is scratched open, the sores can get infected and must be treated by your doctor.
- Scratching the head. Sometimes it takes weeks for a child to start scratching.

## Treatment

Your child’s doctor can suggest a medicated lice shampoo, cream or lotion. You can buy lice products at your local pharmacy without a prescription. Some of the products will have a special nit comb in the package or you can buy one separately. This special comb can help find and remove eggs. It is very important to remove all of the lice eggs and to treat all of your family members.

## Special Warnings about Lice Products

- If you or your child is allergic to ragweed or chrysanthemums, check with your doctor or pharmacist before using any brand of medicated rinse or shampoo. The active ingredient in some brands such as Rid, Pronto, and A-200 could cause a serious allergic reaction.
- If you are pregnant or breastfeeding, **check with your doctor before using lice products.**
- House pets do not carry human lice and should not be treated.

## How to Use Permethrin

### Brand names: Acticin, Elimite, Nix Crème Rinse, and others

For adults and children 2 months old and older:

1. Wash the hair with regular shampoo. Do not use a conditioner. It can keep the lice medicine from working. Rinse with warm water and towel dry. Do not use this towel again until it has been laundered in hot soapy water then dried. Use the hot cycle of your dryer for at least 20 minutes. .
2. Shake the bottle of product well.
3. Protect the eyes with a towel and close eyes tightly.
4. Wet the hair and scalp completely. Be sure to wet the back of the neck and behind the ears. If the product gets in the eyes, rinse right away with cool water.
5. Leave the product on the hair for 10 minutes, but no longer.
6. Rinse the hair and skin around the scalp well with water. Rub with a fresh dry towel. Do not use a hair dryer – some lice products use chemicals that could cause the hair to set on fire.
7. Comb the hair with a fine comb to find the eggs. It may help to divide the hair in sections. All eggs must be removed! It might take 2 or 3 hours or more, and you may have to pick out the eggs by hand if the comb does not work.
8. Put the eggs in a plastic bag, tie it closed and throw it away. Wash your hands well and scrub under your fingernails.
9. Dress your child in clean clothing.

## How to Use Piperonyl Butoxide

### Brand names: Rid and others

For adults and children 2 years of age and older:

- Apply the product to dry hair.
- Follow the instructions for how to use permethrin, starting with Step 2.
- When you rinse the hair with Step 6, use a shampoo and no conditioner, then towel dry.

## After Treatment

- Do not wash the hair for 1 to 2 days after treatment.
- Repeat the treatment 9 to 10 days later to kill any lice before they can produce new eggs.
- Recheck for eggs or lice every 2 to 3 days for 2 to 3 weeks after treatment to be sure they are gone.
- Check the hair and scalp of all family members every day. If you find eggs or lice, treat their hair and clothing the same way.
- If you have used the same treatment 2 or 3 times, and it has not worked, check with your doctor, nurse, or pharmacist.

## To Clear Lice from the Home

- Pest control sprays can be harmful to children and should not be used in the home.
- Head lice can live away from the human body for only 1 to 2 days. Wash all washable clothing (including hats, scarves, and coats) and all bed linens, towels, and washcloths that have had contact with anyone with lice in the 2 days before treatment.
  - Machine wash in hot, soapy water and dry.
  - Use the hot cycle of a dryer for at least 20 minutes.
- Soak combs, brushes, hair barrettes, hair bands and sports helmets in very hot water (130°F) for 10 minutes.
- Pillows, stuffed animals, clothing, and other things that cannot be washed may be dry cleaned or put in air tight plastic bags for 3 days.
- Vacuum all carpets and furniture. Put the vacuum cleaner's dust bag in a plastic bag, tie tightly, and throw away.

## School and Other Parents

- Tell your child's school that your child has lice. The other children will be checked and treated if needed.
- Check with your child's school. In some school systems, the child's hair must be free of all eggs before the child may go back to school.
- Tell the parents of your child's friends, so they can check their children.

## Prevention

- Teach your child to "Never share what touches the hair". Children should not let anyone else use their comb, brush, hats, scarves, pillows, hair accessories, or helmets. They should not borrow them from others either.
- Shampoo the hair 2 or 3 times a week.

**Talk to your child's doctor or your local health department if you have any questions or concerns.**