

Kent County Health Department

Head Lice Fact Sheet



What are head lice?

Lice are hatched from tiny eggs called nits. They live on the hair, eyebrows and eyelashes of humans where they feed and lay eggs.

Eggs take about one week to hatch. To live, adult lice need to feed on blood. If the lice fall off a person, then they will die within two days. The adults' life span is about one month. Eggs can live on clothing for a month.

How do you get head lice?

A person can get head lice by coming into direct contact with an infested person's head or personal items such as combs, brushes and hats. Anyone can get head lice. It is common in school-age children. Head lice can spread as long as lice or eggs remain alive on the infested person or clothing.

What are the symptoms of head lice?

Mild to severe itching is almost always present. You can often see the tiny eggs of nits and the lice

How are head lice diagnosed?

Head lice are diagnosed by the presence of adult lice or eggs. Lice may be hard to see. They are most commonly seen at the nape of the neck and behind the ears. Eggs may be seen as specks "glued" to the hair shaft. Eggs range in color from yellow to gray.

How are head lice treated?

You can get a special lice shampoo or crème rinse. Medicaid will pay for a cream rinse called Nix. A prescription isn't

needed, but be sure to ask the druggist or nurse how to use it. Public Health Nurses recommend using Nix crème rinse. Make sure to follow the directions carefully. If you shampoo too often, it can hurt your child.

After shampooing, check the whole head again for eggs. The lice shampoo and crème rinse will kill the lice and eggs. You need to check the hair carefully because the eggs will stick to the hair. A metal nit (egg) comb is recommended to get eggs out of the hair. They can be found at most drugstores.

Do I need to keep my child home from school?

A child may return to daycare or school the next day after treatment if no live lice or eggs remain.

How can I stop the lice from spreading?

Once you have treated the hair, you need to clean things in your home that may have lice or eggs on them.

- Family members and close contacts of a person with head lice should be examined and treated if they are infested.
- Wash clothes, hats, scarves, sheets, towels, blankets, and pillow cases. Use hot water. Dry in a hot dryer for at least 20 minutes.
- Put stuffed animals and pillows in a hot dryer for 30 minutes or seal in dark plastic bags for 14 days.
- Soak combs, brushes, barrettes and hair bands in **hot** water for 10 minutes.

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- Vacuum the furniture, mattresses, rugs, carpets, and the inside of your car. Throw away the sweeper bag.
- Spraying homes or classrooms with insecticides is not recommended.

How can head lice be prevented?

- Avoid physical contact with a person who has head lice.
- Teach children not to share brushes, combs, hats, scarves or other personal items.
- Talk to the people at your child's school. Let them know what you've done.

This fact sheet is for information only and is not meant to be used for self-diagnosis or as a substitute for talking with a health care provider. If you have any questions about head lice or think you may have it, call your health care provider.