

# PEDICULOSIS (HEAD LICE)

## What are head lice?

Head lice are tiny, wingless insects that live and breed on the scalp of humans. They feed off human blood and can survive for up to 30 days. Head lice only move by crawling, they cannot jump or fly. The head lice eggs (nits) are so small that they are often mistaken for dandruff or other particles found in the hair. Adult lice are a greyish brown colour and are similar size to a sesame seed, roughly 2 to 3mm in length. Most often, head lice are found on the head, but can also be seen on eyebrows and eye lashes.

## What are the symptoms of head lice?

The most common symptom of head lice is itching and scratching of the head, but some people may not itch at all. This irritation is caused by an allergic reaction to the louse bites. Other symptoms may include:

- Scratch marks on the neck and scalp that may look like a rash
- Sores on the head caused by extensive scratching
- A slight tickling feeling of something moving on the scalp and hair

## How does head lice spread?

It is possible for anyone to catch head lice. They are spread by close head-to-head contact with someone who already has lice, which is common when children play with each other. Head lice can also spread through indirect contact when sharing clothing (hats, scarves, coats, etc.), combs, brushes, towels, beds, couches, pillows, and stuffed animals that have recently been in contact with an infested person.

Head lice will die within two days if they do not have a place to feed on. Pets do not get lice and cannot spread them.

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## How are head lice treated?

Treatment options should be discussed with a pharmacist or health care professional to determine the treatment plan that is best for you. All close contacts should be checked for head lice, but only those with confirmed lice should be treated. If one person in a household has head lice, it is likely that other people do as well. Everyone within the household should be checked and treated at the same time.

### The Head Check

- Sit in a well-lit area – near a sunny window or brightly lit lamp
- Divide the hair into sections and look carefully, one section at a time
- Look carefully in the hair, behind the ears, nape of neck, hairline - "the halo" of the head
- Check the heads of all family members
- Don't forget to have your own head checked!
- If you find head lice or nits (eggs), proceed with treatment
- If you don't see lice or nits (eggs), continue to check the head regularly twice a week for one month or more often if there is an out break
- If you see anyone scratching their head or if someone tells you that their head feels itchy, check their head

## How can head lice be prevented?

Anyone can get head lice; it is not a sign of someone's cleanliness. The following steps can be taken to prevent the spread of head lice:

- Avoid head-to-head (hair-to-hair) contact during sports activities, playground, slumber parties, camp, etc.
- Do not share clothing (hats, scarves, coats, towels, etc.) or hair products (combs, brushes, hair ribbons, barrettes, etc.)
- Tie up long hair into braids or ponytails
- Do not lie on surfaces that have recently been in contact with a person infested with head lice (such as beds, couches, pillows, carpets, or stuffed animals)