

Head Lice Information

General Information

Yellow-white in colour, head lice live on the human head and spread through head to head contact.

Head lice

Head lice are small, yellow-white wingless insects that live and feed on the human head (see picture below). They lay eggs (nits) on human hair that hatch within 7 days. The lice move from one person to another through head to head contact with an infested person. This includes sharing personal items such as clothing, combs and head/hair accessories. Lice are easily spread particularly among children because they are more likely to have close contact with other children. Although lice can be transmitted by personal items, the lice cannot survive longer than 24 hours off the human head.

Detecting head lice

Head lice may be experienced by anyone, regardless of personal hygiene. Consequently, it is important to regularly look for lice and eggs. In less than half of all head lice cases, itching is a symptom of head lice. Eggs are usually quite visible, as they are laid within 1.5 cm of the scalp and resemble dandruff. Unlike dandruff, the eggs stick to the scalp and are very difficult to remove.

Small red dots behind the ears and the nape of the neck are often signs of head lice bites. Parents should regularly check their children for head lice. If lice are found, the child's hair must be treated.

To discover if lice are present in hair:

1. Comb conditioner through dry unknotted hair. The conditioner stuns the lice for approximately 20 minutes, which makes it difficult for them to grip onto the hair or move around.
2. Immediately comb sections of the hair with a fine tooth, head lice comb.
3. Wipe the conditioner from the comb onto a paper tissue.
4. Inspect the tissue and comb for lice and eggs.
5. Repeat the steps four to five times for every section of hair

Treatment and Prevention

Head lice treatments are widely available and are easy to apply.

Treating head lice

There are various products available on the market to treat head lice. These products range from natural to chemical treatments to a combination of both. Head lice treatments effectively kill head lice but must be re-applied seven days later to remove any remaining lice. Avoid using hair dryers after applying treatments as the heat may destroy the active ingredients.

All items that have come into contact with hair containing head lice must be treated:

- Soak all washable items in hot water at a temperature of at least 60°C for at least ten minutes;
- Non-washable items, such as teddy bears, should be placed into plastic bags and sealed for 2 weeks to kill all lice;
- Pillowcases and bed linen should be washed in hot water (at least 60°C) or dried in a clothes dryer on the hot or warm setting;
- Vacuum all carpets, lounges, etc.

Are head lice treatments safe?

In general, head lice treatments are safe when used according to the manufacturer's instructions. Head lice treatment products may become dangerous when:

1. Insecticidal head lice products are used to prevent head lice.
2. Using kerosene to treat head lice.
3. Other insecticidal products, such as pet flea or tick treatments, are used on the head.

Consult your doctor before using any head lice treatment on pregnant or breast-feeding women, infants less than 12 months old or people with sensitive skin/

Preventing head lice

To prevent the transmission of head lice:

1. Avoid direct head to head contact and keep long hair tied back or plaited.
2. Discourage children from sharing any headgear, including combs and hats.
3. Check hair for head lice once a week. Daily checks are necessary during outbreaks.
4. Wear gloves or wash your hand after examining hair containing head lice.

Commonly available head lice treatments

Active Insecticide group	Commercial product
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pyrethrins 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Amcal Head Lice Foam • Banlice Mousse • Delva Formula PCT • Lyban Foam • Meditox Foam • Pyrenol • Pyrifoam Lotion
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Synthetic Pyrethroids (Bioallethrin) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Orange Medic • Orange Medic Plus • Pyrifoam Head Lice Treatment • Quellada Crème Rinse • Quellada Head Lice Treatment
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organophosphates (Maldison or Malathion) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cleensheen • Exolice Medicated Foam • HL7 • HLT • Lice Rid • KP24 Lotion • KP24 Foam • LX Medicated Foam
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Combinations of Herbal/Essential Oils 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hearbs for Head Lice • Lice Attack • Quit Nits all Natural Lice Treatment • Sunsprit Aromatherapy • Lice Scents to Kill • Wild Child All Natural Head • Tea Tree Lice Foam • Nad's Natural
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Combinations of Herbal/Essential Oils and Natural Pyrethin 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lice Blaster