

- **Comb wet hair.** Use a fine-toothed or nit comb after regular shampooing and detangling to physically remove the lice from wet hair. Repeat daily until no live lice are discovered for at about 2 weeks. Clean the comb frequently to remove any caught lice or nits. It may require several hours each night for several nights to tackle the problem.
- **Wash contaminated linens.** Wash bedding, stuffed animals, clothing and hats in hot (at least 130° F), soapy water and then dry them at a high heat for at least 20 minutes.
- **Seal un-washable linens.** Place them in airtight bags for 2 weeks. They can also be dry-cleaned.
- **Vacuum.** Vacuum carpets, floors, and any upholstered furniture in your home and car.
- **Wash combs and brushes.** Use very hot, soapy water or soak them in rubbing alcohol for an hour.

There are some things that you should **not** do while treating your child for lice:

- **Do not** use a hair dryer on your child's hair as some of the scalp treatments may be flammable.
- **Do not** wash your child's hair with regular shampoo for 1 to 2 days after using medicated treatment.
- **Do not** use the same medication more than 3 times on one person.
- **Do not** use more than one head lice treatment at one time.

#### Can lice be prevented?

It is difficult to prevent the spread of head lice among children because of the close contact they experience in daycare and school. It is not a reflection on your family's hygiene habits and it is not a failure on your part as a parent if your child gets head lice. Take the following precautions to help prevent a re-infestation:

- Tell your child to avoid head-to-head contact with other children.
- Tell your child to not share combs, brushes, hats, scarves, bandanas, ribbons, barrettes, hair ties, towels, or helmets whether they have lice or not.
- Tell your child to not lie on bedding, pillows, and carpets that have recently been used by someone with lice.
- Check members of your family regularly for lice and nits.

Lice can be very persistent and make it feel as though they are never going to go away! If your child still has lice after 2 weeks of treatment or if your child's scalp looks infected, call your child's pediatrician.

**References:** [www.kidshealth.org](http://www.kidshealth.org)  
[www.mayoclinic.com](http://www.mayoclinic.com)  
[www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)  
[www.hsph.harvard.edu/headlice](http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/headlice)

# Pesky Hair Critters: The Facts About Head Lice



HOLY INNOCENTS'  
EPISCOPAL SCHOOL

805 Mount Vernon Highway, NW  
Atlanta, GA 30327

## What are head lice?

Head lice are tiny, wingless parasitic insects that live in human hairs and feed on extremely small amounts of blood drawn from the scalp. Lice are not dangerous and do not spread disease, but they are contagious and can be downright annoying. Their bites can cause the scalp to become itchy and inflamed. If itching persists, it can lead to skin irritation and even infection.

## Who gets head lice?

Head lice do not discriminate. **Lice infest all socioeconomic classes and all ages of both genders of people.** Lice are a very common problem, especially for children from 3 to 12 years old. Girls tend to suffer from lice more often than boys and women more than men. **Personal hygiene and cleanliness in the home or school has nothing to with getting head lice.**

## What do head lice look like?

There are 3 forms of lice: the egg (known as the nit), the nymph, and the adult.



**Nits** are head lice eggs. They are very small, hard to see, and can be confused for dandruff, but nits cannot be brushed away or shaken off. Nits are laid by the adult female at the base of the hair shaft nearest the scalp where the temperature is warm. They are oval shaped, yellow to white in color, and firmly attached to the hair shaft. Nits take about 1 week to hatch. Eggs that are likely to hatch are usually located within  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch of the scalp.



The nit hatches into a baby louse call a **nymph**. It looks like an adult head louse, but smaller. Nymphs mature into adults about 7 days after hatching. The live nymph must feed on blood to live.

The **adult** louse is about the size of a sesame seed, has six legs, and is tan to grayish-white. Females, which are usually larger than the males, lay eggs. Adult lice can live up to 30 days on a person's head. To live, adult lice need to feed on blood. If the louse falls off a person, it dies within 2 days.



## Where are head lice most commonly found?

They are most commonly found on the scalp, behind the ears, and near the neckline at the back of the neck. Head lice hold on to hair with hook-like claws found at the end of each of their six legs. Head lice are rarely found on the body, eyelashes, or eyebrows.

## Are head lice contagious?

Lice are highly contagious and can spread quickly from person to person, especially in group settings. Even though **head lice cannot fly or jump**, they have specially adapted claws that allow them to crawl and cling firmly to hair. Anyone who comes in close contact (especially head-to-head contact) with someone who already has head lice is at greatest risk. Sharing bed linens, clothing, combs, brushes and hats can also spread lice.

## How are lice treated?

**Treatment should be considered only when active lice or viable eggs are observed.** Without magnification and suitable experience, they may be difficult to distinguish from other material caught in the hair. Seek assistance if you are unsure if your child has an active infestation.

Your child's pediatrician can recommend a medicated shampoo, cream, or lotion to kill the lice. These may be over-the-counter or prescriptions medications. It is important to follow the directions exactly because these products are insecticides. Medicated lice treatments usually kill the lice and nits, but it may take a few days for the itching to stop. Repeating the treatment in 7 to 10 days may be recommended to ensure that all the nits have been killed, because even one nit left behind can cause a re-infestation. The following steps may help you eliminate lice infestations: (see back cover)

- **Buy a fine-toothed comb.** The comb's effectiveness is dependent on:

- Composition (metal vs. plastic) and construction (length and spacing of comb teeth)
- Texture of the hair being combed (straight vs. curly)
- Technique used to comb
- Time and care expended in the effort