Head Lice & How to Get Rid of Them

What are Head Lice?
- Head lice are tiny insects that can be found on the head, eyebrows and eyelashes of people.
- They are flat, and are a dirty white or grayish black color.
- Head lice cannot jump or fly.
- They crawl through human hair.
- Head lice are not found on pets.
- Female head lice lay eggs called nits.
- Nits are oval shaped, and appear white or pale yellow.
- Nits are found close to the scalp, behind the ears, and at back of the neck.
- Nits are very difficult to remove, if you can blow or flick it off the hair- it is not a nit.
- Head lice are very common and can spread quickly from person to person, especially in group settings, (schools, slumber parties, childcare centers, sports activities, and camps)
- Head lice are more common in younger children than adults
- Females are affected more often than males.
- Having head lice is not a sign of uncleanliness or poor hygiene.

What are the symptoms of head lice?
- Tickling feeling of something moving through the hair.
- Itching
- Difficulty sleeping- head lice are most active in the dark.
- Sores may be seen on the head. These are caused by scratching.
- Seeing lice or nits.

How does a person get head lice?
- Head lice are spread by physical contact with an infected person’s hair.
  Example: When a person with head lice hugs a person without head lice
- While not as common, head lice can spread by sharing clothing or other personal items.
  -Sharing clothing such as hats, coats, sports uniforms
  -Sharing towels, bedding, scarves, combs or brushes, earphones, sport helmets.
  -Laying on a bed, couch, pillow or carpet that has recently been in contact with a person with head lice
- Dogs, cats, and other pets do not spread head lice.

How long do head lice live?
- Female lice lay 3-10 eggs a day
- Eggs hatch in about 7-10 days
- Newly hatched lice become adult head lice in 7-12 days
- Adult lice live 3 to 4 weeks
- During the 3 to 4 weeks an adult female head lice may lay up to 100 eggs
- Lice can live off of the head for 12 to 15 hours
- Eggs, or nits can live off the head for 10 days
How do I get rid of head lice?
- All household members and other close contacts should be checked for head lice.
- Anyone with head lice should be treated.
- All people with head lice (household members, close contacts, bedmates) should be treated at the same time.

First Step: Use a Head Lice Shampoo or Head Lice Cream Rinse
- There are currently 2 types of lice killing medications available under different product names. They are both safe and effective when used as it says on the box, and work by poisoning the lice. They can be found at a local drug store. No prescription is needed.
  - **Permethrin Lotion, 1%** is sold as Nix™
    - Permethrin is approved for use on children 2 months and older.
    - It is a cream rinse applied to freshly washed and towel dried hair.
    - Permethrin kills live lice but not unhatched eggs (nits).
    - Permethrin may continue to kill newly hatched lice for a few days after treatment.
    - A second treatment is often needed on day 9 to kill any newly hatched lice before they can produce new eggs.
  - **Pyrethrin** is sold as RID®, R&C®, Pronto®, Triple X®, and A200®
    - Pyrethrin is approved for use on children 2 years of age and older.
    - It is a shampoo applied to dry hair.
    - Pyrethrin kills live lice, but not unhatched eggs (nits).
    - A second treatment is recommended on day 9 to kill any newly hatched lice before they can produce new eggs.
    - Not for persons allergic to chrysanthemums and rag weed.

- **What To Do**
  - Choose a shampoo and follow the package instructions carefully for the product you use.
  - Note: **Do not use** a shampoo with conditioner or a cream rinse before using a lice-killing medication. This may decrease the medication's ability to work.
  - Before applying treatment, remove clothing that may become wet or stained.
  - Use a towel to keep the product away from the eyes.
  - Have the person with head lice put on clean clothing after treatment.
  - If a few live lice are still found 8-12 hours after treatment, but are moving more slowly than before, do not treat again. The medicine may take longer to kill all the lice. Comb dead and any remaining live lice out of the hair using a fine-toothed nit comb which can often be found in lice medicine packages. (Flea combs made for cats and dogs may also work.)
  - If, after 8-12 hours of treatment, no dead lice are found and lice seem as active as before, the medicine may not be working. **Do not treat again until checking the medication box or speaking with your health care provider;** a different medication may be needed. If your health care provider recommends a different medication, carefully follow the treatment instructions contained in the box or printed on the label.
  - After each treatment, check the hair every 1-2 days and comb the hair with a nit comb to remove nits and lice.
  - **Continue to check/nit comb the hair for 2 to 3 weeks to be sure all lice and nits are gone.**
  - Read the medication box to see if another treatment is needed.
  - Do have patience! Lice can be hard to get rid of.
What Not To Do:
- Do not treat a person with head lice with the same lice-killing medication more than 1 time every 7 - 10 days.
- Do not treat a person with head lice more than a total of 3 times with the same lice-killing medication.
- **Do not mix lice-killing medications in a single treatment.**
- Do not treat children under the age of 2 years old with lice-killing medication, unless medication is safe for children under 2. Check the information on the box or check with your physician. Instead, remove lice and nits with nit comb.

Second Step: Clean the Environment
- Head lice do not survive long if they fall off a person
- Follow these steps to help avoid getting lice again from lice that have fallen off the hair or crawled onto clothing or furniture.
  - Machine wash and dry clothing, bed linens, and other items that the person with lice wore or used during the 2 days before treatment
  - Make sure you use the hot water (130°F) laundry cycle and the high heat drying cycle.
  - Non-washable items need to be dry cleaned OR sealed in a plastic bag and stored for 2 weeks.
  - Soak combs and brushes in HOT water (at least 130° F) for 5-10 minutes
  - Vacuum floor and furniture, particularly where the person with head lice sat or lay.
  - DO NOT use pest control sprays- they can be harmful.

Third Step: Keep Removing the Nits
Nit removal has to be done to get rid of lice. Nit removal can be very time consuming. For best results follow these 'nit picking' tips:
- Work under good light such as sunlight near a window or outdoors, or sit near a bright light. Using a magnifying glass can be helpful.
- Use a regular comb or brush to remove tangles. (Make sure you clean this brush after use.)
- Divide the hair into sections and fasten off the hair that is not being worked on at this time (Do not forget to clean or replace these hair ties) Use a special "nit comb" comb TOWARDS the scalp to break the egg from the hair
- Go section by section through the hair until all sections are completed
- Keep the nit comb clean by rinsing with water or wiping with a tissue or old toothbrush. Carefully dispose of the tissue or old toothbrush when done
- When all done- look AGAIN for any live lice or nits that may have been missed.
- Live lice can be caught with tweezers, fingernails, or scotch tape.
- Missed nits can be pulled off using fingernails.
- Wash hands and clean under fingernails after treating the hair and removing all nits.

Fourth: Keep Checking for Nits and Inform Others
- Even with all above steps completed, a few nits may be missed
- Keep checking the hair for nits and live lice every 1-2 days for at least 2-3 weeks.
- Finding 1 or 2 nits each time does not always mean the child still has live lice
- Finding 3 to 5 nits, near the scalp each time, means live lice may still be on the head.
- Check all family members, adults and children and treat if lice or nits are found
- Inform the school nurse, teacher, day care provider, and any neighbors or friends who many have had close contact with the person who has lice.
How do I prevent getting head lice?

- Avoid head-to-head (hair-to-hair) contact during play and other activities at home, school, and elsewhere (sports activities, playground, slumber parties, camp).
- Do not share clothing such as hats, scarves, coats, sports uniforms, hair ribbons, or barrettes.
- Do not share combs, brushes, or towels. Disinfest combs and brushes used by a person with head lice by soaking them in hot water (at least 130°F) for 5-10 minutes.
- Do not lie on beds, couches, pillows, carpets, or stuffed animals that have recently been in contact with a person who has head lice.

Additional Information:
Public Health Nurse Help Line:  (608) 266-4821
Centers for Disease Control Head Lice Website:  http://www.cdc.gov/parasites/lice/head/index.html
American Academy of Dermatology Website:  http://www.aad.org/dermatology-a-to-z/diseases-and-treatments/e---h/head-lice/head-lice
Wisconsin Department of Health Services Head Lice Information: http://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/communicable/diseasepages/PediculosisHeadLice.htm