

Head Lice

Head lice are a parasitic insect that live close to the human scalp. Lice can be seen in the adult (live) stage or as nits (eggs). Lice are spread by direct contact with the hair of an infested person. Head lice do not spread disease and can often be treated at home without visiting a health care provider.



Symptoms:

- Feeling of something moving in your hair
- Itching in the head
- Difficulty sleeping
- Sores on the head caused by scratching
- Live lice or nits seen in the hair or on the scalp

Self-care measures:

- Apply over-the-counter lice medicine according to the instructions. Options include a sodium chloride solution (LiceFreee®) or medicine that contains pyrethrin and piperonyl butoxide or permethrin lotion, 1%. If hair is longer than shoulder length you may need two bottles.
 - Pay special attention to the instructions on how long to leave the medication on and how it should be washed out.
 - Do not use a combination shampoo/conditioner, or conditioner before using lice medicine.
 - Do not re-wash hair for 1-2 days after the lice medicine is removed.
- Put on clean clothes after treatment.
- If a few live lice are still found 8–12 hours after treatment, but are moving more slowly than before, do not retreat. 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.
- Nit (head lice egg) combs, often found in lice medicine packages, should be used to comb nits and lice from the hair shaft. Many flea combs made for cats and dogs are also effective.
- After each treatment, checking the hair and combing with a nit comb to remove nits and lice every 2–3 days may decrease the chance of re-infestation. Continue to check for 2–3 weeks to be sure all lice and nits are gone.
- Retreatment is meant to kill any surviving hatched lice before they produce new eggs. For some drugs, retreatment is recommended routinely about a week after the first treatment (7–9 days, depending on the drug) and for others only if crawling lice are seen during this period.

Prevent re-infestation and/or spread:

- Machine wash and dry clothing, bed linens, and other items that the infested person wore or used during the 2 days before treatment using the hot water (130°F) laundry cycle and the high heat drying cycle. Clothing and items that are not washable can 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 the floor and furniture, particularly where the infested person sat or lay. However, the risk of getting infested by a louse that has fallen onto a rug or carpet or furniture is very small.
- Do not use fumigant sprays; they can be toxic if inhaled or absorbed through the skin.
- Do not share your combs, brushes, or towels.
- Do not lie on beds, couches, pillows, carpets, or stuffed animals that have recently been touched by a person with head lice, unless they have been cleaned (as listed above), and the person has also been treated

When to seek care from a medical provider:

If 8-12 hours after treatment the lice are moving just as much as before treatment.

Other resources:

- Center for Disease Control: <http://1.usa.gov/frburO>
- Virginia Department of Health: <http://bit.ly/1athQ1K>

UHC self-care guidelines are based on the most recent recommendations of national medical authorities.