

## CONTROLLING HEAD LICE

### ***What are head lice?***

Head lice are tiny insects the size of a sesame seed. Young lice, or nymphs, are transparent, but as they feed on blood they become a reddish brown to black color. Usually head lice do not cause serious health problems, but their presence can be annoying and emotionally traumatic.

### ***How do you get head lice?***

While head lice do not fly or jump, they can move very quickly. Transmission of head lice usually occurs through close contact with an infected individual. Sharing of hats, brushes, combs, or pillows can easily spread head lice from one person to the next. Close head-to-head contact, such as when children are playing together, can also transmit head lice.

### ***What are the symptoms?***

Children with head lice may complain of their head itching. Some children may also have red, hive-like bumps on their scalp. Upon close inspection of the head, live lice may be seen, but not always. The nits, or lice eggs, are often the only visible evidence of a lice infestation. The tiny yellowish-white oval nits are attached to the hair shaft and may be confused with dandruff. Unlike dandruff, nits are not flaky or easily removed from the hair. Nits may be found throughout the hair, but are most commonly seen at the back of the head, just above the neck, or behind the ears.

### ***How do you treat head lice?***

Once you have determined your child has head lice, you can begin treatment. Use of over-the-counter (OTC) pediculicides are the first step. When using these products (e.g. *Nix*, *RID*, *A-200*) the directions should be carefully followed. In addition to use of OTC pediculicides, manual removal of lice and nits is necessary. The hair should be inspected in one inch segments. A fine-tooth lice comb (e.g. *LiceMeister*) can be used to comb out remaining live lice and nits. Not doing proper manual removal can cause OTC pediculicides to fail. This can increase the chance of resistance developing.

Re-treatment with the OTC pediculicides may be necessary, seven to ten days after the initial treatment, to kill remaining lice or lice that have recently hatched. If this second treatment fails, you should contact your healthcare provider for further instructions. It is important to avoid the use of dangerous chemicals such as rubbing alcohol, kerosene, gasoline, or paint thinners.

### ***How do you prevent reinfestation?***

To prevent reinfestation machine wash all potentially exposed clothes, bedding, and towels in hot water, and dry them in a hot dryer. Items that can't be washed or dry cleaned can be vacuumed. The use of lice sprays on furniture is not recommended. Continue to inspect your child's hair closely for the next several weeks, and then periodically thereafter. Routine screening and early detection are the best prevention.

For additional information on this and other health issues, visit: [MedlinePlus.gov](http://MedlinePlus.gov)