

# LICE (PEDICULOSIS), HEAD

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## DEFINITION

- Nits (white eggs) are firmly attached to hairs.
- Unlike dandruff, nits can't be shaken off.
- Gray bugs (lice) are 1/16 inch long, move quickly, and are difficult to see.
- The scalp itches and has a rash.
- The back of the neck is the favorite area.
- The nits are easier to see than the lice because they are white and very numerous.

## Cause

Head lice only live on human beings and can be spread quickly by using the hat, comb, or brush of an infected person or simply by close contact. Anyone can get lice despite good health habits and frequent hair washing. The nits (eggs) normally hatch into lice within 1 week. Pubic lice ("crabs") are slightly different but are treated the same way. They can be transmitted from bedding or clothing and do not signify sexual contact.

## Expected Course

With treatment, all lice and nits will be killed. A recurrence usually means another contact with an infected person or the shampoo wasn't left on for 20 minutes. There are no lasting problems from having lice and they do not carry other diseases.

## HOME TREATMENT

### Antilice Shampoo or Rinse.

Your child's antilice shampoo or rinse is \_\_\_\_\_.

Wash the hair with your regular shampoo, rinse it and towel-dry it. Pour about 2 ounces of the shampoo into the damp hair. Scrub the hair and scalp for 10 to 20 minutes. Rinse the hair thoroughly and dry it with a towel. These shampoos kill both the lice and the nits. Most antilice shampoos need to be repeated once in 7 days to prevent reinfection.

(*Note:* A new antilice shampoo called Nix only requires one application.)

**Removing Nits.** Remove the nits by back combing with a fine-tooth comb or pull them out individually. The nits can be loosened from the hair shafts using a mixture of half vinegar and half water applied for 30 minutes under a towel wrap. Even though the nits are dead, most schools will not allow children to return if nits are present. Obviously, the hair does not need to be shaved to cure lice.

**Lice in the Eyelashes.** If you see any lice or nits in the eyelashes, apply petroleum jelly to the eyelashes twice a day for 8 days. The lice won't survive.

**Cleaning the House.** Lice can't live for more than 72 hours (3 days) off the human body. Your child's room should be vacuumed. Combs and brushes should be soaked for 1 hour in a solution made from the antilice shampoo. Wash your child's sheets, blankets, and pillowcases in hot water. Items that can't be washed (hats or coats) can be set aside in plastic bags for 3 weeks (the longest that nits can survive). Antilice sprays or fumigation of the house is unnecessary.

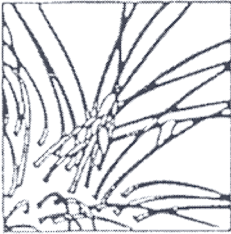
**Contagiousness.** Check the heads of everyone else living in your home. If any have scalp rashes, sores, or itching, they should be treated with the antilice shampoo even if lice and nits are not seen. Your child can return to school after one treatment with the shampoo. Reemphasize to your child that he or she should not share combs and hats.

## What to do if your child comes home with head lice:

Don't panic. Anyone, adult or youngster, can get head lice. Head lice are passed from one person to another by direct contact or on shared objects (combs, towels, headphones, etc.). It has nothing to do with cleanliness and does not reflect poorly on you as a parent. The problem is easily managed. Just follow the instructions below:

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- 1.** Check every member of the family. Look for tiny white eggs (nits) on hair shafts, especially at the nape of the neck and behind the ears. Head lice are small grayish-tan insects without wings. Any family member with lice or nits must be treated.



- 2.** Use an effective head lice treatment. Several are available without prescription. The crème rinse requires just one application and protects against reinfestation for up to two weeks. Shampoo treatments require a second application 7-10 days after the first, are less effective, and offer no extended protection.



Ask your pharmacist for more information.

- 3.** Removal of nits. Gently comb the child's hair with the special nit removal comb. These combs are provided with the lice treatment products.

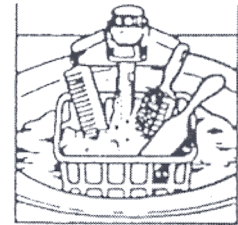


- 4.** Wash

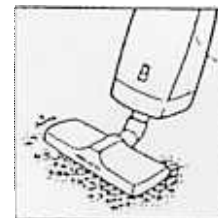
clothes, bed linens and towels. Use hot water and dry on hot cycle for at least 20 minutes. Items not machine washable must be dry cleaned or stored at room temperature in a tightly sealed plastic bag for at least two weeks. Items such as headphones and helmets should be simply bagged and stored.



- 5.** Soak combs, brushes, etc. in hot water. The hotter the better, but at least 130° F. Items should be allowed to soak for at least 10 minutes.



- 6.** Vacuum everywhere. To make sure the rest of your home is lice free, you should vacuum carpets, pillows, mattresses, upholstered furniture and even the car seat.



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Head lice cannot survive without a human host. They cannot survive on family pets. Choose an effective treatment, use as directed, and perform the steps listed above to help eliminate head lice from your home and to help prevent their spread to the community.