

LICE

(Pediculosis; Head Lice; Body Lice; Crab Lice)



BASIC INFORMATION

DESCRIPTION

Lice are tiny parasites that live on the body or in clothing. Pediculosis (lice infestation) is the medical term. Three types of lice affect humans: head lice, body lice, and crab (or pubic) lice. Head lice are common in school children.

FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

- Itching and scratching of the head or other body parts. It may take 2 to 3 weeks or longer after being infected before itching symptoms start. The itching is more common at night.
- You may see eggs ("nits") on hair shafts.
- Scalp may be red and sore. The hair may be matted.

CAUSES

Tiny parasites that bite through skin to obtain nourishment (blood). The bites cause itching, redness, and soreness.

RISK INCREASES WITH

- Contact with an infected person.
- Contact with an infected object such as combs, hats, helmets, clothing, sheets, or pillowcases.
- Crowded living conditions.
- For crab lice, sexual intercourse with an infected person.
- Body lice are not common. They occur in the homeless, and those who can't bathe or change clothes often.

PREVENTIVE MEASURES

- Bathe and shampoo hair often. However, good hygiene alone will not prevent head lice.
- Don't share combs, brushes, or hats with others. Wash combs and brushes carefully.
- Careful follow-up in schools and daycare centers where head lice have occurred.
- If head lice or nits are found on your child, notify the child's school or daycare.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

Usually curable with treatment. Allow 5 days after treatment for symptoms to disappear. Lice often recur.

POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

Infection at the site of scratching.



DIAGNOSIS & TREATMENT

GENERAL MEASURES

- Self-diagnosis and self-treatment are sometimes all that is needed for head lice.
- When unsure if hair lice are the problem, or if body or crab lice are the cause, see your health care provider.

Lice are diagnosed with a physical exam of the affected area. A sample of the lice or nit may be removed for viewing under a microscope. Other medical tests may be done in some cases.

- Treatment may be done with a product to kill the lice and eggs. Manual removal may be the best option. It should be done even when an anti-lice product is used. If the lice infect eyelashes, they should be removed by your health care provider.
- Uninfected family members do not need treatment.
- For manual removal, use a special nit comb. A magnifying glass may help you see the nits and lice. Live lice are hard to see as they move quickly. Part the hair in sections and examine each part carefully.
- Wash articles such as combs, curlers, hairbrushes, and barrettes in hot water.
- Vacuuming floors, furniture, car seats or other items may help remove any hairs with nits on them. Special lice sprays may sometimes be recommended.
- Machine-wash clothing and bedding in hot water. Dry in the dryer's hot-air cycle. Putting unwashable items in plastic bags for 2 weeks has been recommended in the past, but is probably not needed. Lice can't live longer than 24 hours unless they have blood for food.
- For more information, contact the National Pediculosis Association, 50 Kearney Rd., Needham, MA 02494; (781) 449-NITS; website: www.headlice.org.

MEDICATIONS

- Nonprescription anti-lice (pediculicide) products are available. One type is Nix which contains permethrin. Follow label instructions for use and follow-up care. Use a special nit comb to help rid the hair of nits. Repeat the treatment in 7 to 10 days.
- Your health care provider may prescribe, and give directions for using, other anti-lice products.

ACTIVITY

No limits.

DIET

No special diet.



NOTIFY OUR OFFICE IF

- You or a family member has symptoms of lice that you are concerned about.
- Self-treatment for lice has not worked.

Special notes:

More notes on the back of this page