

LICE (PEDICULOSIS), HEAD

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.



CALL OUR OFFICE

During regular hours if

- The rash and itching are not cleared by 1 week after treatment.
- The sores start to spread or look infected.
- The lice or nits return.
- You have other questions or concerns.