



Fact Sheet

South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control • www.scdhec.gov

Head Lice (*Pediculosis*)

<p>What is <i>pediculosis</i>?</p>	<p><i>Pediculosis</i>, or head lice, are parasitic insects found on the heads of people. Head lice are very common particularly in children. Head lice infestation is not affected by the length of hair or by the frequency of shampooing. HEAD LICE DO NOT CARRY DISEASE and are not a health problem. Head lice are transmitted from person to person by close contact. Sometime head lice are transmitted by sharing personal items such as hats, helmets, hairbrushes and combs.</p> <p>There are three stages of lice: the nit, the nymph, and the adult. Nits are head lice eggs. They are hard to see and are often confused for dandruff or hair spray droplets. Nits are found firmly attached to the hair shaft. When the nit hatches into a baby louse it is called a nymph. Nymphs mature into adults about 7 days after hatching. Adult lice can live up to 30 days on a person's head. Head lice are most often found on the scalp behind the ears and near the neckline at the back of the neck.</p>
<p>What are the symptoms?</p>	<p>The most common sign of head lice is itching. Most people do not develop itching until after head lice have been present for several weeks. Other possible symptoms are a tickling feeling of something moving in the hair and sores on the head caused by scratching.</p>
<p>How are head lice treated?</p>	<p>Many head lice medications are available over-the-counter at your local store. To treat anyone infested with head lice, follow these steps:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Before applying treatment, remove all clothing from the waist up. 2. Apply lice medicine, also called pediculicide according to the label instructions. Do not use a creme rinse or combination shampoo/conditioner before using lice medicine. Do not re-wash hair for 1-2 days after treatment. 3. Have the infested person put on clean clothing after treatment. 4. If some live lice are still found 8-12 hours after treatment, but are moving more slowly than before, do not repeat. Comb dead and remaining live lice out of the hair. The medicine sometimes takes longer to kill the lice. 5. If no dead lice are found 8-12 hours after treatment and lice seem as active as before, the medicine may not be working. See your doctor for a different medication and follow their treatment instructions. 6. A nit comb should be used to remove nits and lice from the hair shaft. Many flea combs made for cats and dogs are also effective. 7. After treatment, check hair every 2-3 days and use a nit comb to remove any nits or lice you see. 8. Repeat in 7-10 days according to product instructions. 9. Check all treated persons for 2-3 weeks after you think that all lice and nits are gone. <p>Other steps you should take to prevent the spread of head lice to other household members are:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To kill lice and nits, machine wash all washable clothing and bed linens that the infested person touched during the 2 days before treatment. Use the hot water cycle to wash clothes. Dry the laundry using the hot cycle for at least 20 minutes 2. Dry clean clothing that is not washable, (coats, hats, scarves, etc.) OR Store all clothing, stuffed animals, comforters, etc., that cannot be washed or dry cleaned into a plastic bag and seal for 2 weeks. 3. Soak combs and brushes for 1 hour in rubbing alcohol, or wash with soap and hot water. 4. Vacuum the floor and furniture.

<i>How do people catch this disease?</i>	Anyone who comes in close contact with someone who already has head lice, or their contaminated clothing, and other belongings is at risk of getting this condition. Preschool and elementary-age children, 3-10, and their families are most often affected. Girls get head lice more often than boys, women more than men. In the United States, African-Americans rarely get head lice. Head lice do not live on animals, so you cannot get pediculosis for a pet.
<i>What can be done to stop the spread of this disease?</i>	The best way to prevent the spread of head lice is to limit contact until the infested person has been treated as outlined. Children with head lice should be allowed to return to school as soon as they have been treated.