

How do I control lice at home?

- Bedding, towels, clothing, hats, toys, etc., should be washed in hot water and dried in a hot dry cycle, dry cleaned, or sealed in plastic bags for 2 weeks. Do not use insect sprays because they can be harmful.
- Soak combs, hairbrushes and hair ornaments in hot water for 1 hour.
- Vacuum carpets, furniture and mattresses where the person with lice lays or sits.

Never use insect sprays to control lice. They are not needed and are harmful to people and pets.

How do I limit the spread of head lice?

Parents and schools both play a role in limiting head lice in schools, community groups, and families.

What role do parents and guardians play?

- Examine your child's scalp every week.
- Encourage children not to share combs, barrettes, hats, scarves, headphones, or headgear.
- Treat your child as quickly as possible.
- Take the time to remove the nits after treatment.
- Tell all possible contacts so other cases can be found and treated (e.g., teachers, parents of classmates, and playmates)
- Once treated, a child with head lice can go back to school.

What role do the schools play?

- Give information to parents about finding and treating head lice.
- Treatment information, prevention, consultation and control are available from public health nurses in schools.
- School boards work closely with Alberta Health Services-Calgary to find ways of limiting the spread of head lice.

Parents are encouraged to call their school nurse, community health centre, or their family doctor for more information about preventing, recognizing, and treating head lice in their family.

Call Health Link Alberta at 403-943-LINK (5465) in the Calgary area or 1-866-408-LINK (5465) toll-free for more information if you are pregnant, breastfeeding, have children less than 24 months, or are allergic to ragweed or chrysanthemums.

On-line resources:

1. Canadian Pediatric Society
www.caringforkids.cps.ca/whensick/HeadLice.htm
2. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
www.cdc.gov/lice

This material is for information purposes only. It should not be used in place of medical advice, instruction, and/or treatment. If you have questions, speak with your doctor or appropriate healthcare provider.

health information

Head Lice: Facts and Treatment



Head lice have been around for centuries. They continue to be a pest despite modern treatment and prevention programs. They do not spread any diseases, but are a concern to parents and their children.

Facts about Head Lice

- Head lice are small greyish insects the size of a grain of salt (1–2 mm).
- They do not jump or fly, but they move quickly.
- An adult louse can live for 1 to 2 days away from the human head.
- Nits (the eggs of lice) hatch in 7 to 9 days. Once hatched, lice need 7 to 13 days to mature and start producing nits.
- A female louse will live about 25 days and can lay 4 to 10 eggs per day.
- Head lice on humans are not the same as those found on house pets.
- At any one time, 10% of elementary school children can have head lice.
- Anyone can get head lice—there is no connection between head lice and how clean you are or your social status.
- Constant itching of the scalp is often a sign of lice.

How do you get head lice?

- Direct, head-to-head contact is the most common way: A person’s head infested with lice must touch another person’s head.
- Uncommon ways of spreading head lice are sharing hairbrushes, combs, hats, headgear, scarves, coats, or contact with pillowcases, blankets, and stuffed toys of people with head lice.

- Head lice can be spread anytime children are in groups such as daycare, schools, playgrounds, summer camps, and families where 1 person has lice.

Checking for Head Lice

If you think your child has head lice, check him or her right away:

- Look very carefully, lice are small.
- The nits (about 1 mm long) can be seen firmly attached to hair (do not confuse with dandruff, which is easily brushed off).
- Lice are usually found around the temple, above and behind the ears, and at the back of the neck.
- Have good lighting when you do a head check.

How do you treat head lice?

If 1 person has head lice, all family members should be carefully examined for lice as well. Treat only those family members who have lice.

Treat head lice with anti-lice shampoo or lotions. Common treatment products are Nix®, R & C, Kwellada-P®, Pronto®, and Resultz®.

Each head lice treatment product is used differently. Read and follow product instructions and warnings very carefully. The guidelines below will help you treat the scalp for head lice.

- Hair must be free of any hair products before treatment—they can decrease how well the anti-lice product works. Wash hair with plain shampoo. No creme rinse or 2 in 1 shampoo and conditioners. Rinse with water and dry well.
- Use enough of the head lice product soak the hair completely (long hair may need more than one bottle). Leave the product on the hair for the recommended time—no longer.
- After rinsing the lice product from the scalp, do not shampoo for at least 2 days after treatment. Shampooing too early can decrease how well the product works.

After using a head lice product:

- Remove remaining nits. Use a fine-tooth comb or your fingernails. Be patient—remember, the nits are very small. Put the nits in a bag and throw out the bag. It may take several days to remove all the nits.
- If you see live lice 2 days after the first treatment, treat again with a different product. Follow with another treatment in 7 to 10 days.
- If no lice are seen, re-treat with the same product 7 to 10 days after the first treatment. The second treatment kills nits that may have been missed the first time.
- Other products (e.g., tea tree oil, petroleum jelly (e.g., Vaseline®), olive oil, and kerosene) have been suggested to treat head lice; however, there are no published trials on how safe or effective these home remedies are.