

# Facts of Lice

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## What are head lice?

♣ ♣ ♣ ♣ (life size)

Head lice are tiny grey/brown insects that live only on the scalp of human beings. They crawl quickly but cannot fly or jump. They are not found on household pets. Having head lice does not mean you are unclean. They do not spread disease. The saliva from head lice when feeding can cause itching. Scratching may cause sores, which can get infected.



Adult Louse



Adult female lice glue eggs on the hair shaft close to the scalp. Live eggs are oval and dark in colour similar to the hair colour. They are stuck to the hair and do not fall off if you touch them. Even after the eggs hatch (7-10 days), the white shells stay on the hair shaft. Baby lice start at pencil-dot size and mature in 7-14 days molting three times.

## How are Lice Spread?

Anyone can get head lice. They spread by head to head contact. When children play, their heads often touch and lice crawl from one child to another and then on to family members. Head lice may also spread by sharing brushes, combs and anything that is worn or used on the head – remind children not to share these items. Tie long hair back e.g. in a pony tail. Check children's heads weekly.

## How do I check for Lice?



Use a bright light. Use a magnifying glass if you have one. Part the hair in small sections and look near the scalp. Lice crawl very fast so they are difficult to find. The Wet Combing Method can be used to find head lice as well as get rid of them (instruction sheet available on website). Look for dark eggs glued on the hair close to the scalp. These have been laid recently. They are often found in warm spots e.g. on the hair behind the ears or back of the neck. Check all the people that live in your house.

## What do I do if someone in my family has head lice?

If you find lice, tell anyone in close contact such as family members, friends and classmates so they can be checked for lice.

Everyone in the house who has head lice will need to be cleared of head lice at the same time to control the spread. Treatment products are to be used only on people who have head lice. They do not prevent head lice.

## How do I get rid of head lice?

There are many head lice treatment products. New products are available for people who do not want to use traditional insecticides and you can use the Wet Combing Method. Talk to a health professional about the best product for you. (See precautions - next page). Read all instructions

carefully and follow them step by step so that the product will work effectively. Wash and rinse hair in the sink, not in the bath or shower. Using a comb with **very small spaces between the teeth** is most important to getting rid of all lice.

**No product kills all of the eggs. Remove all the eggs or within 7 – 10 days some will hatch and you will see baby lice which will grow and spread to others.** A new infestation is more easily recognized if you remove all the eggs. **A second treatment 7 - 10 days after the first treatment is suggested to kill any newly hatched lice from eggs you have missed.** Limit use of regular shampoo and hair products until a few days after first and second treatment to allow head lice product to work most effectively. Check every week to make sure lice are gone.

**Precautions** - Check with your doctor or pharmacist before you use any product if ....

- Anyone has allergies especially to chrysanthemums, ragweed
- Anyone has a seizure disorder
- You are pregnant or breastfeeding and you need treatment or you need to treat other people (Contact Motherisk at 416-813-6780)
- Your child is under 2 years old
- The skin of the scalp is cut or infected.
- Head lice are found after first treatment, or head lice continue to reoccur

For repeated, persistent cases, some parents have reported success with methods using olive oil, mineral oil, tea tree oil, melaleuca oil, and hair gel. Since these methods have not been scientifically tested, they are not considered reliable or safe treatments for head lice.

## How do I get rid of all of the eggs?



Removing eggs after the treatment can end your head lice problems. Start by using a fine-tooth comb. Then remove the smaller eggs by hand.

- Sit under a bright light or in sunlight
- Have your child watch television, a video or read to keep still. Work for 10-15 minutes at a time.
- Work with a small section of wet hair (clip the rest out of the way)
- Comb the smaller eggs off the hair strands using your thumbnail and fingernail.
- Continue section by section until you remove all the eggs.

Check the hair 2 times a week for 4 weeks to make sure all the eggs have been removed.

## Do I need to wash or clean anything else?

Soak combs, brushes in hot water and head lice product for 5 - 10 minutes. Wash clothes, hats, towels and bedding used in the past three days, in hot soapy water and dry in a dryer for 20 minutes after the first and second treatment. Vacuuming is helpful, but special sprays are not needed on furniture or floors. Lice live only a short time away from the head.

## Who do I call if I have questions?

- ✓ **Niagara Region Public Health at 905-688-8248 or 1-888-505-6074 ext. 7379**
  - ✓ **Telehealth Ontario 1-866-797-0000**
- For more information – search head lice [www.niagararegion.ca](http://www.niagararegion.ca)**