



What Are Head Lice?

An estimated 6–12 million head lice infections occur annually in the U.S. among children ages 3–11.

1. Introduction

Head lice are tiny parasitic insects that feed on blood from the human scalp. A female louse will lay eggs that stick to the hair shaft and are difficult to see because they are so tiny. The only way to be sure that someone has head lice is by finding live lice. Head lice are most common among children and are spread through direct transfer from one person's hair to another's hair.

2. Transmission

Head lice cannot jump or fly, so they often spread by crawling from one person to another through direct head contact. Lice do not carry bacteria or viruses and cannot be spread by animals or household pets. Though not as common, head lice may spread by:

- + Wearing clothing such as hats, scarves, coats, or hair ribbons worn by an infected person
- + Using infested combs, brushes or towels
- + Lying on a bed, couch, pillow or carpet that has recently been in contact with an infected person

3. Symptoms

Itching is the most common symptom of head lice. It is often most noticeable on the back of the head and neck and near the ears, as this is where lice are more likely to live. Other symptoms include:

- + A tickling feeling or sensation of something moving in the hair
- + Sores from itching and scratching, which can become infected
- + Difficulty sleeping caused by lice activity

4. Treatment

Head lice can be diagnosed by a visual inspection of the scalp. Once identified, treatment includes using over-the-counter medicated or prescription shampoos, lotions or creams that eliminate head lice. Another treatment option is to remove lice by hand. This method can be used if medicine did not completely remove the lice or if medicated lice treatment is not an option. In this method, patients will run a fine-tooth comb through wet and heavily conditioned hair one section at a time. This should be done every 2-3 days for 2-3 weeks after the last live louse was seen.

Did you know?

Head lice infestations are most common among preschool and elementary school-age children as well as their household members and caretakers.

For more information on head lice and supportive resources, please visit www.kidshealth.org

References:

<https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/head-lice/symptoms-causes/syc-20356180>

<https://www.cdc.gov/lice/about/head-lice.html>

<https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/diseases/10824-head-lice>

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/head-lice-and-nits/>

<https://kidshealth.org/en/parents/head-lice.html>