

# INTEGRATED PEST MANAGEMENT: HEAD LICE



Head lice are tiny grayish-white or tan-colored insects that live and breed on the hair and scalp. Lice feed on blood. They draw from the scalp and cause itching. Adult head lice are about the size of a sesame seed. Their eggs are called nits. Anyone can get head lice, regardless of personal hygiene or family income. However, young children get head lice easily because they:

- ▶ Play together and have close physical contact.
- ▶ Nap close together.
- ▶ Hug often.
- ▶ Share play things and equipment.

## When are head lice a problem?

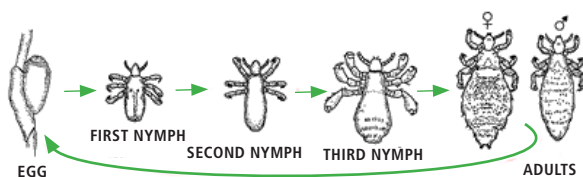
Head lice don't carry disease, but they are bothersome. Head lice cause itching and irritation of the scalp. It takes time and patience for parents to treat and remove lice and nits from their child's hair. Treatment can be an added expense, and it is extra work to wash clothing and bedding. Head lice is spread easily among children and can continue to spread until the live lice are gone.

## Habits of head lice

Head lice crawl and do not hop or fly. Lice have six legs with tiny claws to grab onto hair and are difficult to see because they move quickly. Nits (tiny grayish-white eggs) are easier to see because they don't move and attach to hair shafts within ¼-inch from the scalp. Nits seen on hair farther away from the scalp have most likely already hatched. Nits can be mistaken for dandruff, but unlike dandruff, nits are hard to remove. To remove a nit, pull it along to the end of the hair shaft or use a fine-toothed metal lice comb. Head lice do not live on family pets.

## Life cycle of lice

- ▶ Female adult lice produce up to 10 eggs per day.
- ▶ Nits remain on the hair shaft and hatch after 7-12 days.
- ▶ Lice can reproduce 2-3 weeks after hatching.



## Should children with head lice be excluded?

Children should not be sent home early because of head lice. Children with new cases of head lice can finish the day and be treated before returning to child care the next day. No-nit policies requiring that children be free of nits before they return to child care are not recommended (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2015).

## IPM Strategies

### 1 LIMIT THE SPREAD

- ▶ Avoid head-to-head contact during an infestation. Head lice is usually spread through direct head-to-head contact.
- ▶ Avoid sharing combs, brushes, hair-ties, ear buds or headphones, bed sheets, blankets, hats, dress-up clothes, and costumes.
- ▶ Children with an active infestation need treatment. Treating all infested children at the same time will prevent further spread and re-infestation.
- ▶ Check all children for head lice when there's a known case in your program.

### 2 MONITORING AND MANAGEMENT

- ▶ Talk to parents about how important it is to follow through with treatment at home.
- ▶ Household members and other close contacts of children with head lice should be checked and treated if necessary.
- ▶ Refer parents to their child's primary care provider for advice about head lice treatment and nit removal.
- ▶ Learn to recognize nits and other signs of head lice. Regularly check children's hair when there's a known case of head lice in your program.

[IPM Strategies continued]

- ▶ Wash clothes (including hats and scarves) and bedding in very hot water. Soak combs and hair brushes in hot (149°F or 65°C) water for at least an hour. Vacuum carpets and upholstered furniture in rooms used by anyone with head lice. Head lice cannot survive away from humans for more than a few days.
- ▶ Communicate closely with families in your program.

### ACTION PLAN FOR HEAD LICE

WHEN TO TAKE ACTION	TREATMENT	NOTIFICATION	PREVENTION
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Perform a well-organized and quick response to the first case of head lice.</li> <li>▶ Check children for lice and nits if you notice them scratching their heads or if they complain of an itchy scalp.</li> <li>▶ A child with a new case of head lice needs to be treated before returning to child care the next day.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Advise parents of children with head lice to talk with their child’s primary care provider about treatment.</li> <li>▶ Over-the-counter louse treatments can be used according to label instructions.</li> <li>▶ Lice and nits can be removed by combing wet hair with a fine-toothed metal louse comb.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Notify parents about new cases of head lice.</li> <li>▶ Provide information to parents about detecting and managing head lice.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Avoid head-to-head contact during an infestation.</li> <li>▶ Avoid sharing combs, brushes, hair-ties, hats, ear buds or headphones, bed sheets, blankets, dress-up clothes, and costumes during an infestation.</li> <li>▶ Observe children for signs of head lice and communicate closely with families.</li> </ul>

#### RESOURCES

- University of California Statewide IPM Program: *Head Lice*  
[www.ipm.ucdavis.edu/PMG/PESTNOTES/pn7446.html](http://www.ipm.ucdavis.edu/PMG/PESTNOTES/pn7446.html)
- American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), Clinical Report 2015, *Head Lice*  
<http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/135/5/e1355.full.pdf+html>
- Alameda County, CA Vector Control Services, *Head Lice*  
[www.acgov.org/ehs/vector\\_control/head\\_lice/lice.htm](http://www.acgov.org/ehs/vector_control/head_lice/lice.htm)
- The National Pediculosis Association, Inc., *Head Lice*  
[www.headlice.org/](http://www.headlice.org/)
- California Department of Public Health, *Head Lice*  
[www.cdph.ca.gov/healthinfo/discond/pages/headlice.aspx](http://www.cdph.ca.gov/healthinfo/discond/pages/headlice.aspx)
- Kids Health, *Head Lice*  
[http://kidshealth.org/parent/infections/common/head\\_lice.html](http://kidshealth.org/parent/infections/common/head_lice.html)

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