



What are head lice?

- Lice are tiny insects that live on and crawl through the hair. They are clear in color when the eggs hatch. Adult head lice are reddish-brown in color. A louse has six legs with claws to help hold onto the hair. An adult louse is about the size of a sesame seed. They do not leave the human host on their own—they must be physically dislodged. They don't hop, fly, or jump. They do not infest pets, furniture, carpeting, or toys. Head lice live only on the heads of humans.
- Lice need human blood to survive. Most will die within 24 hours without a "meal."
- Lice lay eggs (nits) on the hair close to the scalp. It takes about 10 days for a newborn louse to become an adult. At this point she can begin laying eggs. One louse can lay 10 eggs or nits a day up to 10 days.
- Nits are easier to see than lice. Nits are oval shaped and most often can be seen in the hair behind the ears or near the neck.
- **Head lice themselves are not a health hazard** or a sign of uncleanliness, and are not responsible for the spread of any disease.



What are the symptoms?

Itching of the scalp is the most common symptom. There may also be a sense of something moving in the hair and irritability. Scratching can lead to skin sores and skin infections.

Do children need to be excluded from group settings?

No child should be excluded from K-12 school due to head lice. Head lice are not a health hazard and are not easily spread in the classroom. However, parents and guardians must be informed that prompt, proper treatment is in the best interest of their child and his or her classmates. A child with identified head lice should be treated at home before returning to school the next day.



Not many studies have been done on the control of head lice outside of school-aged populations. Licensed child care facilities must follow their licensing regulations and their facility policies. Licensed child care centers must follow WAC 170-295-3030 which states that children with lice or nits must be excluded.

Snohomish Health District Mission Statement

To improve the health of individuals, families, and communities through disease prevention, health promotion, and protection from environmental threats

For lice treatment information, Call to speak to a clinic nurse:

425.339.5220 Everett

425.775.3522 Lynnwood

Recorded lice/scabies
information line: 425.339.5269

Communicable Disease
Outreach for Child Cares:
425.339.5278

PUBLIC HEALTH
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HEALTHIER SNOHOMISH COUNTY

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Head Lice

What They Are and How to Control Them



How can you prevent head lice outbreaks?

- Check your child's hair weekly for lice or nits, especially if they attend group settings, such as school, child care, camps, or sleepovers. Check daily if there has been a case of lice reported in the classroom or if your child has been scratching his/her head.
- Begin treatment right away if you find lice.
- Keep long hair up or in a braid or ponytail.
- Avoid head-to-head contact with people who have lice.
- Do not share combs, brushes, towels, bedding, hats, coats, or clothing.
- In group settings provide separate storage areas for each person's clothing and other personal articles. Put personal articles in individual bins or sacks.
- Avoid sharing costumes, hats, or helmets. If helmets are worn by different children, wipe them out with a dry paper towel between children. Do not avoid the use of helmets for fear of lice. A head injury is much worse.
- Assign sleeping mats and bedding to only one child and store these separately. In group settings, sleep children 30" apart or in a head-to-foot arrangement.



Steps for eliminating lice/nits

There are a variety of treatments for lice. Head lice shampoo or rinse contains pesticide (also called insecticide or pediculicide). Pesticides are available for purchase over the counter and by prescription. Carefully follow the package directions. Improper use of the pesticide can cause the treatment to fail. Many experts now recommend treatment be repeated in 7 to 10 days, preferably on day 9. Removal of nits by combing immediately after treatment with a pesticide is not necessary to prevent spread because only live lice cause an infestation. If you are pregnant or breastfeeding, or if a child is under 2, consult with your health care provider for treatment recommendations. Individuals with cuts or sores on their head or people with allergies or asthma may also have sensitivities to certain products.



Consult your health care provider for guidance.

Check all family members to see who needs to be treated. Only treat individuals with visible lice or nits. Do not use lice pesticides when no lice are present.

Are there alternatives to pesticides?

Treatment options other than the use of a pesticide exist, including manual removal with a fine-toothed comb from wet hair or in conjunction with a product designed to suffocate or immobilize lice. Specialty hair salons exist in some areas that charge a fee to remove lice and nits.



If you choose to comb, do it daily for three weeks to help assure that all nits are removed before they can hatch into lice. If you quit too early, you may miss a tiny nit and the lice will return. Be sure to use an effective nit-removal comb with long metal teeth spaced very close together. Divide the hair into sections and work methodically so you don't miss any parts. Dip the comb in hot water and wipe with a paper towel after each pass.



Cleaning household items

Lice cannot live for more than two days off of a head. Only items that have been in contact with the head of the person with an infestation in the 24 to 48 hours before treatment need to be considered for cleaning. There is no need to clean every nook and cranny. If lice return, it is usually because a louse or nit was missed during treatment.

Lice sprays for your house are not recommended.

Pets cannot get head lice. Don't use lice pesticides on your pets.

Suggested household cleaning:

Clean items used by people with lice during the two days before you began lice treatment.

- Wash sheets, pillow cases, towels, and clothing. Use hot water (130°F) or the "hot" dryer setting for 30 minutes.
- Things that can't be washed can be:
 - run in the dryer on the "hot" setting for 30 minutes.
 - sealed in a plastic bag for more than 2 days, or
 - dry cleaned.
- Soak brushes, combs, barrettes, and other hair holders in a bleach solution for 1 hour. To make the solution, mix 1/4 tsp bleach with 1 quart cool water.
- Vacuum the floor, furniture, and car seat. Throw the vacuum bag away or empty the canister in an outside garbage container.

