

**KENTER CANYON ELEMENTARY CHARTER SCHOOL**  
*Los Angeles Unified School District*

**HEAD LICE INFORMATIONAL SHEET**

*The following information is based in part upon information from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP).*

## HEAD LICE



The bane of many parents, the head louse is a tiny, wingless parasitic insect that lives among human hairs and feeds on extremely small amounts of blood drawn from the scalp. Although they may sound gross, lice (the plural of louse) are a very common problem, especially for kids ages 3 years to 12 years (girls more often than boys).

Lice aren't dangerous and they don't spread disease, but they are contagious and can just be downright annoying. Their bites may cause a child's scalp to become itchy and inflamed, and persistent scratching may lead to skin irritation and even infection.

### What are head lice?

Head lice are parasites that can be found on the heads of people. Infection with head lice is called pediculosis.

(The head louse, *Pediculus humanus capitis*, is different from the lice that cause body and pubic-hair infections.)

Having head lice is **not** a sign of uncleanness or poor hygiene. The pesky little bugs can be a problem for kids of all ages and socioeconomic levels, no matter how often they do — or don't — clean their hair or bath. Head lice are spread through direct head-to-head contact with an infested person. From each egg or "nit" may hatch one nymph that will grow and develop to the adult louse. Lice feed on blood once or more often each day by piercing the skin with their tiny needle-like mouthparts. While feeding they excrete saliva, which irritates the skin and causes itching. Lice cannot burrow into the skin.

### How can I prevent my kids from getting lice?



You *can* help to prevent kids from getting lice — or from becoming reinfested with lice — by taking the following precautions:

- Tell kids to try to avoid head-to-head contact at school (on the playground or during sports) and while playing at home with other children.

- Tell kids not to share combs, brushes, hats, scarves, bandanas, ribbons, barrettes, hair ties or bands, towels, helmets, or other personal care items with anyone else, whether they may have lice or not.
- Tell kids not to lie on bedding, pillows, and carpets that have recently been used by someone with lice.
- Every 3 or 4 days, examine members of your household who have had close contact with a person who has lice. Then, treat those who are found to have lice or nits close to the scalp.

## **How common is head lice infestation?**

Head lice infection is very common. Lice are highly contagious and can spread quickly from person to person, especially in group settings (schools, childcare centers, slumber parties, sports activities, and camps).

It has been estimated that up to one in every 10 children in school acquires head lice at some time. In one study, the estimated annual cost of head lice infestations in the United States was nearly \$1 billion dollars.

## **Who is at risk for getting head lice?**

Anyone who comes in close contact with someone who already has head lice, or even their contaminated clothing and other belongings, is at risk for acquiring head lice. Preschool and elementary school children (3-10 years of age) and their families are infected most often. Girls contract head lice more often than boys; women more often than men. African-Americans rarely acquire head lice.

## **How in the world does a child get head lice?**

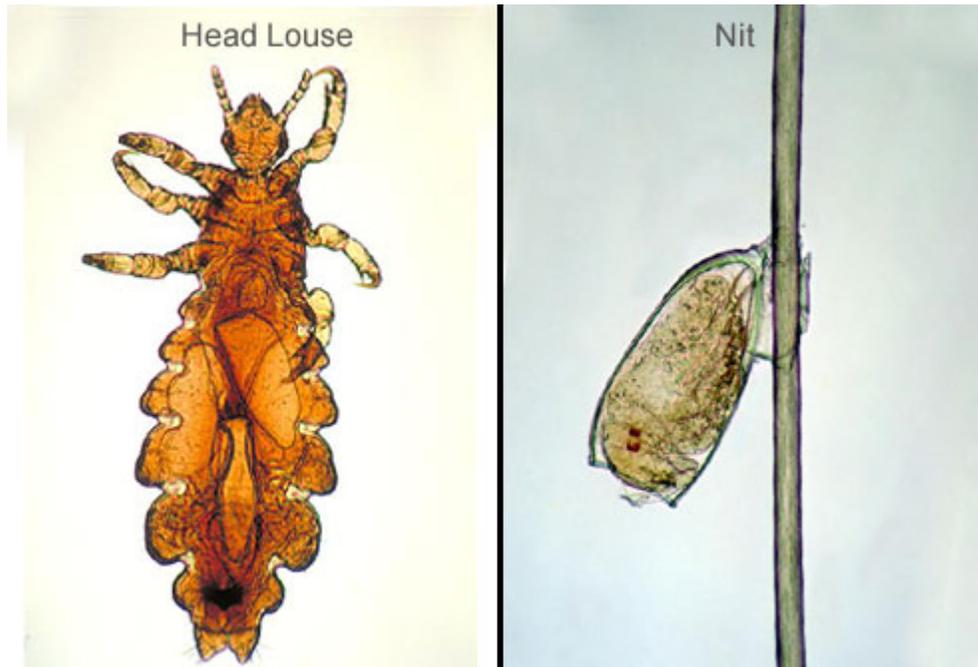
A child can contract head lice in a number of ways:

- contact with an already infested person. Personal contact is common during play, school, or sports activities, and at school, home, slumber parties, or camp;
- wearing infested clothing, such as hats, scarves, coats, sports uniforms, or hair ribbons;
- using infested combs, brushes, or towels; or
- lying on a bed, couch, pillow, carpet, or stuffed animal that has recently been in contact with a person with lice.

Though they can't fly or jump, these tiny parasites have specially adapted claws that allow them to crawl and cling firmly to hair. They spread mainly through head-to-head contact, but sharing clothing, bed linens, combs, brushes, and hats can also help pass them along. Kids are most prone to catching lice because they tend to have close physical contact with each other and often share personal items.

## What do head lice look like?

There are three forms of lice, namely the **nit**, the **nymph**, and the **adult louse**:



**Nit:** Nits are lice eggs. Nits are hard to see and are often confused with dandruff or hair spray droplets. Nits are found firmly attached to the hair shaft. They are oval and usually yellow to white. Nits take about a week to hatch.

**Nymph:** The nit hatches into a baby louse called a nymph. It looks like an adult head louse, but is smaller. Nymphs mature into adults about seven days after hatching. To live, the nymph must feed on blood.

**Adult:** The adult louse is about the size of a sesame seed, has six legs, and is tan to grayish-white in color. In people with dark hair, the adult louse looks darker. Females lay nits; they are usually larger than males. Adult lice can live up to 30 days on a person's head. To live, adult lice need to feed on blood. If the louse falls off a person, it dies within two days.

## Where are head lice most commonly found?

Head lice are most frequently located on the scalp behind the ears and near the neckline at the back of the neck. Head lice hold on to hair with hook-like claws that are found at the end of each of their six legs. Head lice are rarely found on the body, eyelashes, or eyebrows.

## What are the signs and symptoms of head lice infestation?

The signs and symptoms are

- a tickling feeling of something moving in the hair;
- [itching](#) (caused by the an allergic reaction to the bites);

- sores on the head (caused by scratching); these sores on the head can sometimes become infected; and
- irritability (a very nonspecific thing, to be sure).

## How is a head lice infestation diagnosed?

Head lice can be detected by looking closely through the hair and scalp for nits, nymphs, or adults. Locating a nymph or adult may be difficult; there are usually only a few of them, and they can move quickly from searching fingers. However, the presence of nits close to the scalp confirms that a person is infested. If the nits are located more than ¼ inch from the scalp, the infestation is probably an old one. If you are not sure whether or not a person has head lice, the diagnosis should be made by a health-care provider or a professional service. The nits of head lice are easily visible with a microscope.

## How is a head lice infestation (pediculosis) treated?

For effective elimination of head lice, the infested individual, family members that are also infested, and the home must all be treated.

Treatment of the individual and the infected family members:

Over-the-counter (OTC) or prescription medications are used to treat the affected people and their families. Follow these treatment steps:

1. Remove all clothing.
2. Apply lice medicine, also called pediculicide, according to the label instructions. If your child has extra long hair, you may need to use a second bottle. **WARNING:** Do not use a cream rinse or combination shampoo/conditioner before using lice medicine. Do not re-wash hair for one to two days after treatment.
3. Have the infested person put on clean clothing after treatment.
4. If some live lice are still found eight to 12 hours after treatment, but are moving more slowly than before, do not retreat. Comb dead and remaining live lice out of the hair. The medicine sometimes takes longer to kill the lice.
5. If, eight to 12 hours after treatment, no dead lice are found and lice seem as active as before, the medicine may not be working. See your health-care provider for a different medication and follow their treatment instructions.
6. Nit (head lice egg) combs, often found in lice medicine packages should be used to remove nits and lice from the hair shaft. Many flea combs made for cats and dogs are also effective.
7. After the initial treatment, check, comb, and remove nits and lice from hair every two to three days.
8. Re-treat in seven to 10 days.
9. Check all treated people for two to three weeks until you are sure all lice and nits are gone.

## Treating the house:

Treating the whole house is a laborious but important task. Follow these steps:

1. Machine wash all washable clothing and bed linens that the infested person touched during the two days before treatment (to kill the lice and nits). Use the hot water cycle (130 degrees F; 55 degrees C) to wash clothes. Dry laundry using the hot cycle for at least 20 minutes.

2. Dry clean clothing that is not washable (coats, hats, scarves, etc.), or store all clothing, stuffed animals, comforters, etc., that cannot be washed or dry cleaned into a plastic bag and seal it for two weeks.
3. Soak combs and brushes for one hour in rubbing alcohol, Lysol, or wash with soap and hot (130 degrees F; 55 degrees C) water.
4. Vacuum the floor and furniture. Do not use fumigant sprays. (They can be toxic if inhaled.)

Keep in mind that head lice don't survive long once they fall off a person. So it's unnecessary to spend a great deal of time trying to rid the house of lice. However, because lice are easily passed from person to person in the same house, bedmates and infested family members will also need treatment to prevent the lice from coming back.

## **My child has head lice. I don't. Should I treat myself to prevent being infested?**

No. Although anyone living with an infested person can get head lice, you don't need to be treated. Check household contacts for lice and nits every two to three days. Treat if lice and nits are found.

## **Should my pets be treated for head lice?**

No. Head lice do not live on pets. Your pets will not be catching the pests and passing them on to your family. But rest assured that pets **can't** catch head lice and pass them on to people or the other way around.

## **My child is under 2 years of age and has been diagnosed with head lice. Can I treat with prescription or over-the-counter (OTC) drugs?**

No. For children under 2 years old, remove nits, nymphs (immature adult lice), and adult lice by hand, and see your health-care professional.

## **What about non pharmacologic approaches?**

Occlusion therapy, nit combing, and [hair removal](#) have not been proven to be effective in completely eradicating head lice.

Home remedies that have been tried include vinegar, mayonnaise, petroleum jelly, olive oil, butter, rubbing alcohol, and prolonged water submersion. These all fail to eliminate infestation, because these therapies do not kill all of the eggs or lice. This is believed due to the specialized way the parasite "breathes."

Hair removal has never been proven to be effective, but since the louse requires a hair shaft to lay its eggs, it should prevent the lice from multiplying. This is not always considered a desirable option for many children.

## **Which head lice medicine is best for me?**

Consult with your pharmacist or health-care practitioner.

## **What are the rules with head lice medicines?**

When using head lice medicine, as with any medicine, always follow the instructions provided.

When treating head lice,

1. do not use extra amounts of the lice medication,
2. do not treat the infested person more than two times with the same medication (if it does not seem to work, see your health-care practitioner), and
3. do not mix head-lice medications.

## **Should household sprays be used to kill adult lice?**

No. Spraying the house is *not* recommended. Fumigants and room sprays can be toxic if inhaled.

## **Should I have a pest-control company spray my house?**

No. Vacuuming floors and furniture is sufficient to treat the house.

## **Head Lice At A Glance**

- Head lice are insect parasites that are found on human heads. The word lice is plural for louse.
- Head lice are spread by personal contact or the sharing of combs, brushes, caps, and other clothing.
- Head lice are a common problem with preschool and schoolchildren.
- Head lice cause a tickling feeling of something moving in the hair, itching, and sores on the head.
- The affected individual, family members also infected, and the home all should be treated.
- Remember: one head louse + one head louse = two head lice = the beginning of a head-lice infection.
- Very young children should be evaluated by a health-care professional before beginning medications.

## **What happens when lice is detected at Kenter Canyon School?**

- The parent will be contacted so they child can be picked up in order to treat the child.
- A letter is sent home to the students in that class to encourage all parents to check their children.
- Upon return to school, a child must be checked by office staff or the nurse before being admitted to class. The child will not be permitted to class if lice continues to be detected.
- Every 3 or 4 days, examine members of your household who have had close contact with a person who has lice. Then, treat those who are found to have lice or nits close to the scalp.

## **Will They Ever Be Gone?**

As many parents know firsthand, lice infestation can be a persistent nuisance, especially in group settings. If you feel like you're following every recommendation and your child still has lice, it may be because:

- there are still some nits left behind,
- your child is still being exposed to someone with lice,
- the treatment you're using isn't effective.

There's no doubt that they can be hard bugs to get rid of. If your child still has lice for 2 weeks after you started treatment or if your child's scalp looks infected, call your doctor.

No matter how long the problem lasts, be sure to emphasize to your child that although having lice can certainly be very embarrassing, anyone can get them. It's important for kids to understand that they haven't done anything wrong and that having lice doesn't make them dirty. And reassure them that as aggravating as getting rid of the annoying insects can be, there *is* light at the end of the tunnel.

Be patient and follow the treatments and preventative tips as directed by your doctor for keeping the bugs at bay, and you'll be well on your way to keeping your family and our school lice-free.