

Talking Points - Head Lice (answers to common questions)

Where do head lice come from?

People get head lice by being in close contact with someone else who has head lice. Head lice can infest people of all ages, but children are prone to getting head lice because of their habit of playing in close contact, sharing hats, headphones, combs and brushes, sleeping bags, stuffed animals, and clothing.

Only dirty people get head lice, right?

No, dirty people are not the only people who get head lice. Personal hygiene & cleanliness is important in the home or school to reduce chances of infection or re-infection for those who have come in contact with someone with head lice.

Where do head lice hide when they aren't on my head?

Head lice spend their entire life on a person's head. Active stages cannot survive for more than a few days away from a person, and will usually die within hours if knocked off the hair.

Why does my child still have head lice after I treated him/her?

There are 4 reasons why a child will continue to have head lice after being treated: the lice are gone but there are still dead nits on the head, the child has again come into contact with someone who has head lice, improper or incomplete treatment, or the lice are resistant to the treatment. In many cases treatment has not been done correctly. Directions need to be followed EXACTLY for the treatment to work.

My child is getting lice from the school rugs/chairs/mats/etc. Why doesn't the school do something about this problem?

Although lice can be transferred through shared bedding, it is very unlikely that the child is getting lice from school equipment, desks, or rugs. Normal cleaning would remove any lice that were on rugs, etc. and lice do not survive off the person's head for more than a few days at most.

Can my child get lice from the dog (or cat)?

No, head lice are only found on people, and cannot live on pets.

What is the best treatment for head lice?

Ideas on this vary. The best thing to do is to contact your child's pediatrician, the school nurse, or the local health department for the best method for your child. Be sure to follow all instructions exactly.

How about alternative treatment? Do they work?

Mechanically removing lice and nits, using lice or nit combs, can be effective but time-consuming. A specialized nit comb is an important tool for nit-picking, as a regular hair comb may not remove head lice and nits.

Suffocants (i.e., petroleum jelly, mayonnaise, or oil-based products) can obstruct the respiratory spiracles of active lice, and potentially block the holes in the operculum of the eggs thereby suffocating the louse. NOTE: This method does not always work well and can be very messy.

Do I need to spray my house? / Why won't the school spray for lice?

Spraying or fogging a home is **NOT RECOMMENDED**, and may be harmful if used in a poorly ventilated area.

What else can I do to stop my child from getting lice?

Cleaning the home (vacuum, wash bedding, clean brushes, etc.) will help reduce the chances of becoming reinfested with head lice. Check everyone in the household at the same time, prior to cleaning the home. This includes grandparents, younger and older siblings and parents. Statistics have suggested that 60% of people with head lice don't know they have them and have no symptoms. They may be unintentionally infecting others and continuing the cycle.

Why did I have to keep my child home from school until the nits were gone? / Why were infected children allowed back in school with nits?

While there is no scientific evidence demonstrating that keeping children with head lice home will reduce head lice transmission, the head lice policy is ultimately up to the school administration. However, a student should not miss more than one or two days from school because of head lice.

Why doesn't my child's school screen for head lice?

Mass screenings are no longer recommended, but if a substantial number of cases are found, screening the entire school population should be considered.