

Head Lice

What are head lice?

Head lice are parasitic insects that can be found on the head, eyebrows, and eyelashes. Head lice are typically 2-3 mm long and feed on human blood. Head lice are not known to spread disease.

Who is at risk for getting head lice?

Head lice infestation, or pediculosis, is most common among pre-school children, children attending daycare, elementary school children, and the household members of the infected person.



How is head lice transmitted?

Head lice move by crawling; they cannot jump or fly. Head lice are spread by direct contact with the hair of an infested person. Anyone who comes in head-to-head contact with someone who has head lice is at greatest risk. Personal hygiene or cleanliness of the home or school has nothing to do with getting head lice. Dogs, cats, and other pets do not play a role in the spread of head lice.

What are the signs and symptoms of head lice infestation?

- Tickling feeling of something moving in the hair
- Itching caused by an allergic reaction to the bites of the head louse
- Irritability and difficulty sleeping (head lice are more active in the dark)
- Sores on the head caused by scratching

How is a head lice infestation treated?

Head lice is treated by pediculicides, or medicines that are applied to the scalp to kill lice. These can be prescription or over-the-counter. Apply the pediculicide according to the package instructions, paying special attention to how long the medication should be left on the hair and how it should be washed out. Nit (head lice egg) combs should be used to comb nits and lice from the hair shaft. Retreatment may be necessary to kill any surviving hatched lice.

In the household, machine wash and dry clothing and bed linens, vacuum the floor and furniture, and soak combs and hair brushes in hot water for 5-10 minutes.

For more information, visit www.CDC.gov/parasites/lice



Hancock Public Health
Your Recognized Leader in Population Health

