

# Head Lice – Once a Week, Take a Peek

Head lice are tiny grey/brown insects that live only on the scalp of human beings. They are a nuisance but not a health hazard, and a normal part of childhood and school life. They don't result from a lack of cleanliness. It is important for kids to understand that they haven't done anything wrong and that having lice doesn't make them dirty.

**Once a Week, Take a Peek** reminds parents about the need to check their children's hair regularly for lice as a normal part of their family's personal hygiene routine and then take action should any be found.

**CHECK** – your child's hair once a week. It doesn't take long.

**TREAT** – if you find live lice.

**REMOVE** - any dead lice and nits.

**RETREAT** - after 7 to 10 days. **Remove** any nits again.

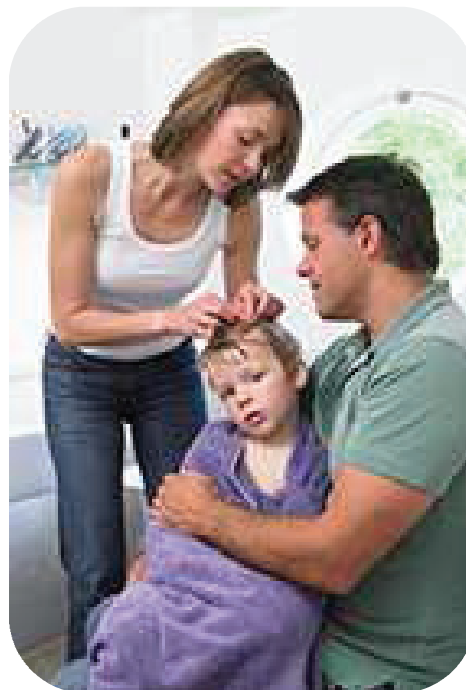
**COMPLETE** – a lice check within 2-3 days of final treatment and weekly after that.

## Who can get head lice?

Anyone can get head lice. School children get them more often because they're frequently in head-to-head contact. Parents can get head lice from children. Sometimes the source is another adult in close contact with the children.

## How do lice spread?

- Direct head-to-head or hair-to-hair contact with an infested person.
- Sharing of personal items like combs, brushes, hats, hair ties, helmets, pillows, etc.
- Head lice crawl quickly from one person's head (or personal items) to another person and they multiply quickly.
- They have no wings and cannot jump or fly.



## Life-cycle of Head Lice

- Adult female lice can lay many eggs over a number of days and weeks. The entire cycle is about 3 weeks long.
- A female louse lays 3-5 eggs a day on the hair shaft close to the scalp. The eggs hatch in 7-10 days and it takes another 7-10 days for the louse to mature and lay their own eggs.
- Head lice live and breed on human hair only and their eggs won't hatch away from the warmth and humidity of the scalp.
- Head lice cannot survive longer than 1-2 days away from the warmth of a human head.

## What are the signs of head lice?

Itching and scratching are common signs of head lice. But often there are no symptoms at all. Because other scalp conditions also cause itching, the best way to check for lice is to look for live lice or nits. To be sure - take a peek.

## Take a peek! What do lice and eggs look like?

Lice are tiny, flat insects that are 1-2 mm long, greyish brown in colour, and are hard to see. Eggs (also called nits) are half the size of a pinhead, oval in shape, gray to brown in colour and can also be difficult to see. Eggs may look like dandruff but are firmly glued to the hair and can't be flicked off. The eggs hatch in about 7 to 10 days. Any eggs more than one cm from the scalp (due to hair growth) have hatched or died. Visit [TBDHU.COM/Schools/headlice](http://TBDHU.COM/Schools/headlice) for more information.

## CHECK: How do I check for head lice?

- Use a bright light and a magnifying glass if you have one
- Part the hair into small sections and look near the scalp, especially behind the ears and the back of the neck.
- Look for lice crawling in the hair. Lice crawl quickly and away from the light.
- Look for dark eggs attached to the hair and laid close to the scalp.
- Check all people in your house. If you find lice, treat them right away.

## TREAT: How do I treat head lice?

Use head lice products only when live lice or nits are present. Treating head lice usually requires 2 shampoo treatments 7 to 10 days apart. Head lice products kill the head lice and many of the eggs but one treatment doesn't kill **all** the eggs. Get a head lice shampoo or cream rinse from the pharmacy. You don't need a prescription. Ask your pharmacist if you have any questions. Follow the product directions very carefully. If possible, wear plastic or rubber gloves to limit your exposure to the shampoo. If you are on social assistance ask your case worker if the shampoo can be covered. **Note:** Shaving a child's head is NOT advised. **Treatment products are to be used only on people who have head lice. They will not prevent head lice.** Sometimes head lice resist one product. If live lice are found within 24 hours after the first treatment, consult with your pharmacist. You may have to try another product.

## First treatment

Timing is important. If the product is rinsed off too soon, lice and eggs may not be killed. If left on too long, there is unneeded exposure to the lice-killing chemicals. Rinse the child's hair under a tap (instead of the shower or bath tub) to limit skin exposure and prevent the child from swallowing any of the product.

## ***Treatment Precautions***

Check with your doctor or pharmacist before you use any product if the person:

- has allergies especially to chrysanthemums or ragweed or any of the ingredients
- has a seizure disorder
- is a child under age 2
- has a cut or infection on the skin of the scalp
- has lice on the eyebrows, eyelashes or beard
- is pregnant or breastfeeding and needs treatment or needs to treat other people (contact Motherisk at (416) 813-6780)

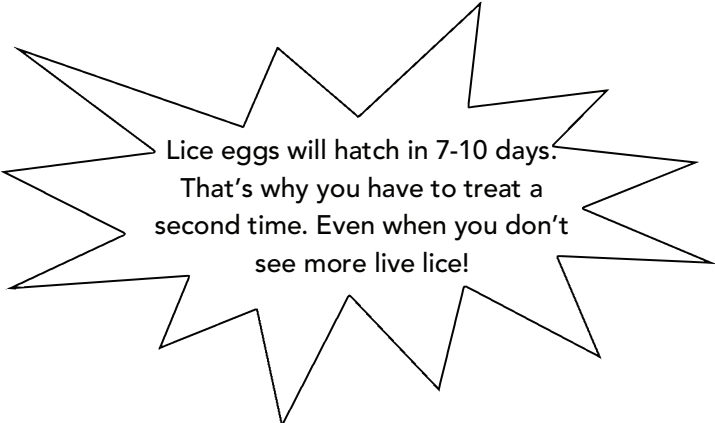
## **REMOVE: How do I remove all the eggs?**

Removing the nits (eggs) after each treatment makes it easier to see new infestations and can end your head lice problems.

- Sit under a bright light or sunlight. A magnifying glass will help you to see the nits more easily.
- Have your child keep still with a favourite book or show.
- Comb the hair to remove tangles then take hold of a lock of hair. Use your thumbnail against your first finger to strip the nits from the hair starting from the roots right down to the tips.
- Place the nits in a bag or the garbage. Pin back that lock of hair and continue until all nits are removed even those very close to the scalp.
- You can also comb out the nits using a fine-tooth comb (nit comb). Eggs very close to the scalp may need to be removed by hand.
- Repeat this process every 2-3 days.

## **RETREAT: Second treatment**

Apply the second treatment in 7-10 days, or as recommended on product, to kill any newly-hatched lice before they can mature enough to lay eggs or transfer to a new head.



Lice eggs will hatch in 7-10 days.

That's why you have to treat a second time. Even when you don't see more live lice!

## **REMOVE: See above.**

**COMPLETE:** After the second treatment and removal of the nits, check the head twice a week for four weeks to make sure all lice are gone. Then continue to check weekly. If the problem continues, see a health care practitioner.

## **What do I do if someone in my family has head lice?**

Follow-up of all close contacts is very important to prevent the spread of lice and to protect your child from being reinfested. If you find lice, tell anyone in close contact such as family members, friends, neighbours, or babysitters. Tell your child's school or day-care centre, and the parents of all playmates so they can check their children's heads too. Everyone in the house who has head lice will need to be cleared of head lice at the same time to control the spread. **Treatment products are to be used only on people who have head lice. They will not prevent head lice.**

## **Do I need to wash or clean anything?**

After the first treatment, wash any combs, brushes, headgear, clothes, hats, bedding and towels used in the past 3 days in hot water and dry in a dryer on hot setting for 20 minutes. You can also put items in an airtight plastic bag for 2 weeks. Vacuuming things you cannot wash (ie helmets) is a good safeguard for any items that may have come into contact with those who are infested. No extra house cleaning or insecticides are needed. Lice cannot survive longer than 1-2 days away from the head.

## **Will they ever be gone?**

As many parents know firsthand, lice infestation can be an ongoing battle, especially in group settings. There's no doubt that they can be hard bugs to get rid of. If you've followed every recommendation and your child still has lice, it could be because:

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

If your child still has lice 2 weeks after you started treatment or if your child's scalp looks infected, call your doctor or health care practitioner. No matter how long the problem lasts, be sure to remind your child that although having lice can certainly be very embarrassing, anyone can get them. Reassure them that as frustrating as getting rid of the lice can be, there is light at the end of the tunnel.



## **Points to remember**

- Close contacts who are not checked for lice are a common reason for reoccurrence.
- Head lice do not live on dogs, cats or other animals, only on humans.
- Keeping hair short and clean does not prevent head lice. Lice can exist in all hair types regardless of how long or clean it is.
- Discourage children from sharing hats, scarves, combs, hair accessories and helmets
- Head lice cannot survive longer than 1-2 days away from the human head.
- Using a lice shampoo when there are no live lice does not prevent them.
- Be patient and follow the treatments and prevention tips as directed and you'll be well on your way to keeping your family lice-free.

***Once a week, take a peek for lice on your child's head.***

## **Who do I call if I have questions?**

Thunder Bay District Health Unit at 807-625-5900 or toll free at 1-888-294-6630

Tele-health Ontario 1-866-797-0000

For more information visit [www.TBDHU.COM/schools](http://www.TBDHU.COM/schools)

*The Once a Week, Take a Peek campaign is a National Parent Campaign from the UK.*