

## **Head Lice Treatments for Kids**

### **Head Lice Basics**

Head lice are common, affect up to 12 million kids each year in all socioeconomic groups in the United States.

Head lice are a common, controversial and frustrating problem for parents. But the controversy isn't only about how they got infected with head lice, but also revolves around how they are going to get rid of the head lice.

On one side of the debate are the people who believe that head lice have developed resistance to regular lice treatments, so that they no longer work. Other experts believe that lice resistance is not a big problem, and head lice treatment failures are because parents don't remove the [nits](#) or that the child was misdiagnosed in the first place.

### **Head Lice**

Once a child gets head lice, the mature or [adult head lice](#) can lay up to 10 eggs or nits each day. These [nits](#), or lice eggs, hatch in about 7 to 12 days. Baby lice or nymphs are about the size of a pinhead when they hatch, and quickly mature into adult lice in about a 9 to 12 days.

In just a few days, adult lice are ready mate, starting this [lice life cycle](#) all over again during their 3 to 4 week lifespan.

### **Lice Symptoms**

The main lice symptoms and signs are an itchy scalp and a rash on your child's neck from the bites of the lice.

These bites can become infected, and may appear red or crusty, and may lead to your child developing swollen lymph glands in his neck.

Head lice don't spread any diseases and don't usually cause any other symptoms.

### **Head Lice Diagnosis**

In addition to having the lice symptoms listed above, children with head lice will have gray or reddish brown live head lice scurrying around their scalp. Lice are small, about the size of a sesame seed, and although they don't fly or hop, they can crawl very fast, making them hard to spot.

Another sign that can help you make the diagnosis of head lice, is finding [nits](#), or lice eggs, attached to your child's hair. Nits are small, oval shaped, are usually a yellowish-white color, and are firmly attached to the side of hair shafts. If you confirm that your child does have live lice or nits, it is important that you don't panic about your child's [lice](#).

### **Head Lice Treatments**

The main treatments for head lice usually involve using a head lice shampoo, **like Rid or Nix**, and then remove nits with a lice comb. Be sure to follow the manufacturer's instructions for whatever products you choose to use, which typically includes a second treatment 7 to 10 days after the first head lice treatment.

You should also check other family members to make sure that they don't have head lice too, although the AAP recommends that 'those with live lice or nits within 1 cm of the scalp should be treated.'

For light infestations or if you are uncomfortable using an anti-lice shampoo, you can try to simply remove the live lice and nits manually.

As there are often a lot of nits on a child and they can be hard to find and remove, you may continue to find nits for days after treatment. This doesn't mean that the treatment didn't work. If you continue to find live lice or new nits close to your child's scalp after treating with a anti-lice shampoo, then that likely does mean that it didn't work or your child was reinfected.

Also be sure to wash your child's clothing and bedding in hot water and vacuum to remove lice and nits from furniture, carpets, stuffed animals, car seats, etc. According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, you really only have to clean "items that have been in contact with the head of the person with infestation in the 24 to 48 hours before treatment," and not everything in your house though. And you can put anything that you can't wash in a large plastic bag for a few weeks if you are really concerned that it is infested, although this is rarely necessary.

### Head Lice Treatments - What You Need To Know

- [Don't Panic About Head Lice](#) - Unfortunately, the first reaction for many parents in dealing with head lice is to panic. Panicking is not going to kill the head lice though and will likely lead to over-treatment and anxiety in your child who may be concerned that they have "bugs" in their hair.
- Nits hatch in 7 to 10 days and develop into an adult in another 7 to 10 days which can then lay more eggs. So it is important to remove all of the nits to break this cycle. Also, since anti-lice shampoos don't usually kill nits, you have to usually retreat the child in 7 to 10 days to kill any newly hatched head lice. Many experts now recommend doing your second head lice treatment on day 9 though.
- Children are often misdiagnosed with head lice because they have hair casts that resemble nits, or they have dead or empty nits that are far away from the scalp. If you think your child has lice but you don't actually see any live head lice, see your pediatrician to confirm the diagnosis.
- You shouldn't usually have to shave your child's head to get rid of head lice.
- Be careful before trying 'alternative' treatments, like mayonaise, vaseline, olive oil or Tea tree oil. Although they are 'natural' treatments, they are untested, and products like mayonaise can be hard to get out of a child's hair (dishwashing liquid is supposed to make it easier though).
- Alternative medications for resistant lice can include Ovide (malathion, an insecticide) and Lindane. Although not approved by the FDA as lice treatments, Elimite, a stronger version of Nix which is usually used to treat scabies, Crotamiton (Eurax), Ivermectim, and the antibiotic Bactrim (which kills symbiotic bacteria inside the lice), are sometimes used to treat resistant lice.
- Ulesfia (Benzyl Alcohol Lotion 5%) is approved to treat children over six months of age with head lice. Unlike other head lice shampoos which are mostly pesticides, Ulesfia is a water-soluble gel that works to suffocate head lice.
- The AAP now advises that 'no healthy child should be excluded from or allowed to miss school time because of head lice' and of course, they are still against no-nit policies that keep kids out of school because they simply have nits in their hair.
- Do your homework or see your pediatrician before treating your child with multiple remedies. This [head lice information sheet](#) at the Harvard School of Public Health and the [The National Pediculosis Association](#) are great sources for more information on head lice infestations.