



1. What are head lice?

Head lice are small insects that live on people's head, eyebrows, and eyelashes. They are most often found behind the ears and near the neckline. Head lice are very common in children. Unlike ticks, head lice do not spread disease.

2. How do you get head lice?

You can get head lice by:

- Having head-to-head contact with an infested person
- Sharing infested clothing (hats, scarves, hair ribbons, coats)
- Using infested items (combs, brushes, towels)
- Lying on a bed, couch, pillow, carpet, or stuffed animal that has been in contact with an infested person.

3. How do you know if you have head lice?

The most common symptoms of head lice include:

- Tickling feeling of something moving in the hair
- Itching, caused by an allergic reaction to the bites
- Sores on the head caused by scratching

Lice go through three stages:

- Nit (eggs): They are hard to see and are often confused with dandruff or hair spray drops. They are attached to hairs, oval and usually yellow to white.
- Nymph (baby lice): They mature into adults in about 9 to 12 days; they are rarely seen due to their small size.
- Adult lice: They are the size of a sesame seed, have 6 legs, and are tan to light grey. To live, adult lice need to feed on blood, but if falls off a person, it dies within two days.

Finding a nymph or adult can be hard because they move quickly from searching fingers. If crawling lice are not seen, finding nits on hairs close to the scalp can confirm that a person is infested.

4. How are head lice treated?

Head lice are treated using over-the-counter medications, including special shampoos or lotions). If that doesn't kill the lice, your doctor can prescribe stronger medications. Some schools, daycares, preschools and nurseries do not let children with head lice return to school until they have been treated.

5. How can head lice be prevented?

It may be difficult to prevent the spread of head lice among children in child care and in school settings. However, there are ways you can help prevent the spread of lice to other members of your family.

- Treat the person who has lice with medicine to kill the lice.
- Wash clothes and sheets in hot water (130°F) and dry on hot cycle for at least 20 minutes.
- Avoid sharing combs, hats, scarves, sheets or towels with others.
- Check your child's hair for head lice on a regular basis.

Sources

1. *Head Lice*. L.A. County Department of Public Health. <http://publichealth.lacounty.gov/acd>
2. *Head Lice*. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. www.cdc.gov/lice/head/
3. *Head Lice*. National Institutes of Health. <http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/>

For additional resources, please visit the L.A. County Department of Public Health website <http://publichealth.lacounty.gov>.