

September is Head Lice Prevention Month

What are head lice?

Head lice are parasitic insects that can be found on people's heads (hair, eyebrows, behind the ears and at the nape of the neck). They survive by feeding on human blood and have three forms: the egg (also called a nit), the nymph, and the adult. Head lice infestations (also called pediculosis) are spread most commonly by head-to-head contact with an infested person.

Dogs, cats, and other pets do not play a role in the transmission of human lice. Head-to-head contact is common during play at school, at home, and elsewhere (sports activities, slumber parties, playground, camps).

Quick facts

- Head lice can survive on a human host for approximately 30 days.
- They move by crawling; they do not jump or fly and generally cannot survive longer than 24 hours off the host.
- A female louse lays 3-5 eggs a day. The eggs hatch in 7-10 days and it takes another 7-10 days for the lice to mature and lay their own eggs.
- Although reliable data on how many people in the United States get head lice each year is not available, an estimated 6 million to 12 million infestations occur each year in the United States among children ages 3 to 11.

Symptoms

- Tickling feeling of something moving in the hair.
- Itching, caused by an allergic reaction to lice bites.
- Irritability and difficulty sleeping; head lice are most active in the dark.
- Sores on the head caused by scratching which can sometimes become infected with bacteria.

How to treat head lice?

Homes or schools don't get head lice – people do. If your child has an active lice infestation, you should notify parents of your child's playmates, as well as your child's school or child care facility, so that steps can be made to prevent further spread.

Both over-the-counter and prescription medications are available, but to eliminate head lice successfully, it is very important to follow and complete all treatment instructions. Please consult your physician to determine the best course of treatment for your household. Vacuuming is the safest and best way to remove lice or fallen hairs with attached nits from upholstered furniture, rugs, stuffed animals or car seats. Pesticide sprays are unnecessary and may pose personal and environmental hazards.

For more information, visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention online at <http://www.cdc.gov/lice>.