

# HEAD LICE 101: THE BASICS

- Do **not** panic! Head lice are *not* an emergency and, in most cases, do not pose any health risk. However, misuse of pesticides and use of unlabeled treatments (ex., kerosene) *can* pose a health risk.
- Head lice CANNOT live off a human host for more than 24-48 hours. Head lice CANNOT live on pets. Head lice CANNOT reproduce in carpets, furniture or other household furnishings.
- **PESTICIDE SPRAYS DO LITTLE OR NOTHING TO CONTROL LICE.** NEVER treat your home, car, furniture, beds, pillows, or clothing with pesticides (e.g. 'lice bombs,' flea bombs, sprays, etc.) in an attempt to control head lice. You will expose yourself and your family to unnecessary pesticide risk.
- If your school sprays rooms, buses, furniture, etc., to control head lice, ask them to stop immediately. Refer your school to the Cooperative Extension Service brochure entitled *A School's Guide to the 'Nitty-Gritty' About Head Lice.*



Head lice can affect people of any socio-economic background and ethnicity and do not imply a lack of hygiene or cleanliness of the infested person.

- Head lice are very common among all classes of people. More than 12 million people, mostly children and school personnel, get head lice per year.
- Direct head-to-head contact with an infested person is the main way head lice are transmitted, but they may also be transmitted by sharing hats, scarves, headphones, combs and other hair accessories. Lice *cannot* hop, jump or fly, but they *can* crawl rapidly.

- The best treatment for head lice is manual removal (see '10 Tips for Manual Removal' in this brochure).
- If a lice shampoo is warranted, ask your doctor or pharmacist for specifics on the product and follow *all* label instructions *exactly*. Misapplications can be ineffective and dangerous as well.



**Figure 1:**  
**Head Louse**  
*Pediculus capitis*

Head lice are small, wingless parasitic insects. They are typically 1/6-1/8 inch long, brownish in color with darker margins. The claws on the end of each of their six legs are well adapted to grasping a hair strand.

A child cannot "catch nits." Nits (lice eggs) can only be laid by live lice.

Female head lice glue their grayish-white to brown eggs (nits) securely to hair shafts. The eggs are resistant to pesticides, and they are difficult to remove without a special 'nit-comb.' The nits are generally near the scalp, but they may be found anywhere on the hair shaft.



**Figure 2:**  
**Nits (lice eggs)**  
*(photo courtesy of the University of Florida)*

The University of Georgia and Ft. Valley State University, the U.S. Department of Agriculture and counties of the state cooperating. The Cooperative Extension Service, the University of Georgia College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences offers educational programs, assistance and materials to all people without regard to race, color, national origin, age, sex or disability.

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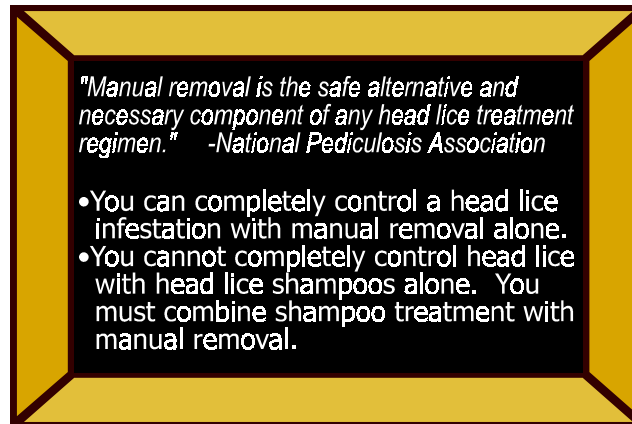
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## HOW TO AVOID A 'HAIR RAISING' EXPERIENCE

- Watch for signs of head lice. Check your children every few days if head lice are reported at their school. Lice are easier to eliminate if caught early.
- Teach your children not to share hats, headgear, scarves, headphones and grooming items (combs, hairbrushes, etc.) and to avoid direct head-to-head contact.
- To kill lice on bedding, clothes, etc., wash and dry them as you would ordinarily. NEVER add any pesticide. Vacuum materials that cannot be washed.
- If you are concerned about head lice on carpets or furniture, vacuum them thoroughly or wipe smooth surfaces with a damp cloth.
- Wash stuffed animals or vacuum them thoroughly. NEVER spray them with a pesticide.
- To kill lice on brushes, combs or hair accessories, wash them with hot, soapy water. NEVER spray them with a pesticide.
- Cooperate with your school's head lice policy. Your child may be temporarily excluded from the school, but the policy helps avoid widespread head lice outbreaks.

## 10 TIPS FOR MANUAL REMOVAL

- 1 Work in a well lighted area or use a flashlight and hand lens.
- 2 Use a grooming comb or hairbrush to remove tangles. A hair detangler spray or other hair conditioner may aid in this process.
- 3 Divide the hair into sections and fasten off the hair that is not being worked on.
- 4 Use a lice comb to detect and remove lice and nits. *See figure 1 and figure 2 in this brochure.*
- 5 Go through hair sections from the scalp to the end of the hair. Nits are usually found close to the scalp.
- 6 Dip the comb in a cup of hot, soapy water or use tape to remove lice, nits or debris from the comb.
- 7 Sift through the same section of hair and look for attached nits and live lice.
- 8 Move on to the next section until the entire scalp and all hair has been checked.
- 9 Screen the infested person every day for 10 days and regularly thereafter.
- 10 If additional nits (at least 3-5 per day) are discovered, another manual search is recommended.



## A PARENT'S GUIDE TO THE 'NITTY-GRITTY' ABOUT HEAD LICE



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