

What are lice and nits?

Lice are tiny but visible insects. They live in hair and survive on human blood. The eggs of lice are called nits. They too are very small but visible. Nits are extremely tiny and white, and they cling to the hair. The female louse attaches her eggs to the hairs near the scalp. The eggs hatch and leave empty nit shells on the hair. As lice mature, they begin laying more eggs. It takes seven to 10 days for lice to mature.

Where do head lice occur?

Lice outbreaks occur worldwide. They are common among young children and their close contacts. They are not related to poor hygiene. Routine hair care will not prevent or cure the problem.

How are head lice spread?

Lice are spread most of the time by head-to-head contact with a person with head lice or by contact with their personal belongings (such as combs, brushes, coats, hats, bed linens or towels) that have live lice or eggs on them.

What are the signs of head lice?

Lice and nits, although very small, can be seen in the hair and scalp. Nits may resemble dandruff. Itching of the scalp is very common, but with mild cases children may not complain. Irritation of the skin at the hairline and ears due to scratching may be present.

How is head lice treated?

Medication in the form of shampoo or crème rinse is available over-the-counter at any drugstore. It is very important that medication instructions be followed *exactly* as written. Over-treatment can be hazardous to a child's health. Nit removal is also very important. The best way to remove nits following treatment is to separate hair into small sections and wet comb each section with a fine tooth comb. Clean comb after each section of hair is combed. Nits should be placed in a sealed trash bag. Nits can sometimes live through the treatment, then hatch and re-infest. Children may return to school after treatment with a significant amount (75%) of nits removed, however daily combing needs to be continued to remove ALL nits.

Directions for using *Lice R Gone* shampoo (Health Department-supplied medication for qualifying families):

Product size - Individual ½ ounce packet or eight ounce bottle (16 shampoos)

1. Thoroughly wet hair with very warm water.
2. Add one tablespoonful or contents of individual packet and work into hair. Add more water to increase lather, if needed.
3. Massage for 15 minutes concentrating on nape of neck and behind ears.
4. Avoid contact with the eyes. If contact occurs, flush eyes with water.
5. Rinse hair well with a strong spray of warm water. Add conditioner if needed to help with combing through tangles.
6. Comb hair in sections with any fine-tooth comb.
7. Clean comb after each section is combed placing nits in a sealed trash bag.
8. Inspect hair under a bright light and remove any remaining nits or lice.
9. Repeat inspection of the hair daily for two weeks.

Important notes:

- *Lice R Gone* contains no pesticides.
- Itching or redness of the scalp may occur after using lice medication. Avoid contact with eyes. If shampoo gets in the eyes, immediately flush with water. After use, store product out of reach of children. If problem persists, contact your school nurse, childcare nurse or health care provider.
- **No method is 100 percent effective.** Remember the most important step in successful treatment is to remove all nits.

Prevention and control measures in the classroom:

- Hang or store coats and hats separately using assigned or labeled wall hooks, lockers or cubbies.
- Tuck hats and scarves into coat sleeves.
- Teach students not to share hats, headgear, combs, brushes, bows, etc.
- Avoid “dress-up” time or activities where clothes or hats are shared.
- Vacuum rugs or carpet daily and throw away the vacuum bags each day.
- Store sleeping mats or towels in individually student-labeled cubbies or plastic bags. Send these items home frequently for laundering. Store other personal items in plastic or paper bag labeled with students’ names.
- Clean headphones with damp cloth between students.
- Investigate any student scratching his head.
- Examine all classroom contacts if head lice have been confirmed.

Prevention and control measures at home:

- All non-pregnant household contacts should be examined and treated, if needed, at the same time as the child.
- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommend removal of lice and nits on household objects in the following *priority order*:
 1. Machine washing with hot water and detergent (especially bed linens, towels and clothes of infested person).
 2. Dry cleaning.
 3. Sealing in plastic bags for two weeks stuffed animals and things that cannot be dry cleaned, washed or dried.
 4. Vacuum upholstered furniture, carpeting, mattress, pillows, floors and automobile. Immediately dispose of vacuum cleaner contents or bags in outside trash.
- Household lice sprays are not recommended.
- Encourage children and others not to use personal articles belonging to someone else. Continue to inspect hair for lice or nits. Use fine-tooth comb every day for two weeks.

For more information contact the Guilford County Department of Public Health at 641-7777 or www.guilfordhealth.org, or the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention at www.cdc.gov