

# FACTS ABOUT HEAD LICE

- **What does head lice look like?** Since adult lice are the size of a sesame seed (2-3mm), head lice can be seen by the human eye. They live in human hair, draw blood from the skin, and lay eggs (called nits) on the hair shaft. Live nits are found less than 1/2 inch from the scalp and most often on hair at the back of the head in the neck region. Some children with lice complain of itchiness but many have no symptoms.
- **Is your child at risk?** Yes. Head lice will spread as long as children play together. They spread almost completely through human hair to hair contact, and pets do not spread lice. Anyone can get head lice. Children in child care, preschools, elementary or middle schools are at risk. Head lice are NOT a sign of being dirty. Head lice are not dangerous and DO NOT spread diseases.
- **What can you do?** Parents are the key to looking for and treating head lice! The Iowa Department of Public Health advises parents to spend 15 minutes each week on each child carefully looking for head lice or nits. Persons with nits within ¼ inch of the scalp OR live lice should be treated. Careful use of a nit comb can potentially remove all lice. Each child should have his or her own comb or brush. Teach your child NOT to share hats, scarves, brushes, combs, and hair fasteners.

**Treatment: The Iowa Department of Public Health recommends a 14-day treatment process. You may use over-the-counter products. They are safe and not costly. Mark your calendar to help you keep track of treatment.**



Lice at various stages of their life cycle

## Treatment Calendar

<input type="checkbox"/> Day 1 <b>Medicated shampoo</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Day 8 Shampoo, condition and COMB
<input type="checkbox"/> Day 2 COMB only DO NOT WASH	<input type="checkbox"/> Day 9 Shampoo, condition and COMB
<input type="checkbox"/> Day 3 Shampoo, condition and COMB	<input type="checkbox"/> Day 10 <b>Medicated shampoo</b>
<input type="checkbox"/> Day 4 Shampoo, condition and COMB	<input type="checkbox"/> Day 11 COMB only DO NOT WASH
<input type="checkbox"/> Day 5 Shampoo, condition and COMB	<input type="checkbox"/> Day 12 Shampoo, condition and COMB
<input type="checkbox"/> Day 6 Shampoo, condition and COMB	<input type="checkbox"/> Day 13 Shampoo, condition and COMB
<input type="checkbox"/> Day 7 Shampoo, condition and COMB	<input type="checkbox"/> Day 14 Shampoo, condition and COMB

## 14 Day Treatment Guidelines

- ✓ The treatment days are scheduled to interrupt the lifecycle of the insect. A **nit comb** should be used to comb the hair and can be bought at most pharmacies.
- ✓ **Day 1:** Use an over-the-counter medicated head-lice shampoo containing pyrethrin or permethrin. Read and follow all directions on the shampoo.
- ✓ **Day 2:** COMB hair carefully for 15 minutes from the scalp to the end of the hair. Do not wash hair today.
- ✓ **Days 3-9:** Wash the hair using your regular shampoo. Rinse. Apply hair conditioner to make the hair slippery. COMB the hair the entire length from the scalp to end of hair. Wipe the comb between each stroke with a paper towel, which removes any lice or nits. Keep hair wet while combing. COMB all hair for at least 15 minutes.
- ✓ **Day 10:** Use an over-the-counter medicated head-lice shampoo. (to kill any lice that hatched since the previous medication use) Read and follow all directions on the shampoo.
- ✓ **Day 11:** COMB hair carefully for at least 15 minutes from the scalp to the end of the hair. Do not wash hair today.
- ✓ **Days 12-14:** Wash the hair using regular shampoo. Rinse. Apply hair conditioner to make the hair slippery. COMB the hair the entire length from the scalp to the end of hair. Wipe the comb between each stroke with a paper towel, which removes any lice or nits. Keep hair wet while combing. COMB all hair for at least 15 minutes.

## Additional Tips

- Treat all family members who have lice at the same time. Use the 14-day treatment process. Rinse combs and brushes in very hot water after each use, and between people.
- Only ordinary house cleaning, vacuuming, and washing bedding and clothes in hot water are needed. No special effort or sprays are needed to clean your home. Only dead or dying lice are found on clothing, bedding, or furniture.
- Use of oils, mayonnaise, lotions, creams, and vinegar has not proven effective; kerosene, gasoline and similar products do not work and are dangerous.



Image of real lice

## What about school?

- There is no need for children to be sent home or to miss school, though treatment should be started before returning to school the next day
- School officials should ask parents to check their children's hair at least weekly.



## What if treatment does not work?

Reasons:

- 1) **Wrong diagnosis** – dandruff, hair products, dust, and other objects can seem like nits (the white eggs) and other insects can look like lice
- 2) **New lice** – child got head lice again from playmate or family member
- 3) **Timing** – the lice may take a few days to die; nits alone do not mean the child still has lice, look for crawling lice
- 4) **Poor treatment** – directions on the treatment product were not correctly followed
- 5) **Resistance to treatment** – some lice are not killed by the chemicals in the over-the-counter treatments (permethrin and pyrethrin)

**After the 14 day treatment, if crawling lice are still present, contact your healthcare provider who may recommend a prescription treatment for lice.**

For more information visit:  
[www.idph.state.ia.us/adper/common/pdf/epi\\_manual/lice.pdf](http://www.idph.state.ia.us/adper/common/pdf/epi_manual/lice.pdf)  
OR [www.cdc.gov/lice/head](http://www.cdc.gov/lice/head)

Reviewed May 2010

# Getting Rid of **HEAD LICE**



## Simple 14-Day Treatment Schedule

and

## Information on Head Lice



Iowa Department of Public Health  
Promoting and protecting the health  
of Iowans