

HOW TO AVOID A “HAIR RAISING” EXPERIENCE



- Watch for signs of head lice (listed in this publication). **Check your children every few days.** 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. Laundry additives like bleach and ammonia don't improve the removal of lice. Regular laundry detergent will work effectively. Use hot water when washing for best results. **NEVER add any pesticides or unlabeled treatments.** 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.**

10 Tips for manual removal

1. Work in a well lighted area or use a flashlight and magnifier (or your phone's camera).
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 Figures 1 and 2 in this publication.
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.

“Manual removal is the safe alternative and necessary component of any head lice treatment regimen.” –National Pediculosis Association

You can completely control a head lice infestation with manual removal alone. You **cannot** completely control head lice with head lice shampoos alone. **You must combine shampoo treatment with manual removal.**

A PARENT’S GUIDE TO THE “NITTY-GRITTY” ABOUT HEAD LICE



UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA
EXTENSION

Allison Faye Johnson
Pesticide Safety Education Program Coordinator
Department of Entomology

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 (e.g., kerosene, veterinary shampoos) can pose a health risk.**

Head lice **cannot** live for more than 24–48 hr off their human host.
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.

Signs of head lice:

- frequent head scratching
- complaints of itchy scalp/head
- redness behind ears or on the back of the neck

Head lice can affect anyone.

They do not imply a lack of hygiene or cleanliness of the infested person.

If your school sprays rooms, buses, furniture, etc., to control head lice, ask them to stop immediately. Refer your school to UGA Extension Circular 850, [A School's Guide to the 'Nitty-Gritty' About Head Lice](#).

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 publication).

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*.

Photo: Mohammed El Damir, Bugwood.org.

Head lice are small, wingless parasitic insects. They are typically 1/6 to 1/8 in. long, and have light brown bodies with darker legs and claws. The claws on the end of each of their legs (shown in Figure 1) are adapted to grasping and holding onto hair.

**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 strands. The eggs are resistant to pesticides, and they are difficult to remove without a specialty fine-toothed “nit-comb.” The nits are generally near the scalp, but they may be found anywhere on the hair strand.



Figure 2. Nits (lice eggs). Photo courtesy of the University of Florida.

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