

FACT SHEET LICE (Pediculosis or Head lice)

What are lice?

Lice are small insects that live in the hairy parts of the body. The eggs (nits), larvae, or adult lice are visible if present on the head or body. Lice move by crawling, they cannot hop or fly. Lice feed on human blood by biting, which can result in severe itching.

Where on the head and scalp are head lice most commonly found?

Head lice and head lice nits are found almost exclusively on the scalp, particularly around and behind the ears and near the neckline at the back of the head. Head lice nits are cemented firmly to the hair shaft and can be difficult to remove.

How are head lice spread?

Head-to-head contact with an already infested person is the most common way to get head lice. Head-to-head contact is common during play at school, at home, and elsewhere (sports activities, playground, slumber parties, camp). Rarely, head lice are spread by sharing clothing or belongings onto which lice or nits may have crawled or fallen. Examples include: sharing clothing (hats, scarves, coats, sports uniforms) or articles (hair ribbons, barrettes, combs, brushes, towels, stuffed animals) recently worn or used by an infested person; or lying on a bed, couch, pillow, or carpet that has recently been in contact with an infested person. The risk of getting an infestation by a louse or nit that has fallen onto a carpet or furniture is very small. Dogs, cats, and other pets do not play a role in the spread of human lice.

How are head lice treated?

The Iowa Department of Public Health recommends a 14-day treatment process.

How effective are home remedies?

There is no proof that use of mayonnaise, vinegar, various types of vegetable oils, Crisco, or Vaseline are effective forms of treatment.

Do infected people need to be excluded from school, work, or child care?

No. For more information on IDPH recommendations for lice in schools, please visit: www.idph.state.ia.us/hcci/common/pdf/headlice_brochure.pdf

What can be done to help prevent and control the spread of head lice?

- Avoid head-to-head (hair-to-hair) contact during play and other activities at home, school, and elsewhere (sports activities, playground, slumber parties, camp).
 - Do not share clothing such as hats, scarves, coats, sports uniforms, hair ribbons, or barrettes
 - Do not share combs, brushes, or towels. Disinfect combs and brushes used by an infested person by soaking them in hot water (at least 130°F) for 5-10 minutes
 - Do not lie on beds, couches, pillows, carpets, or stuffed animals that have recently been in contact with an infested person.
 - Do not use fumigant sprays or fogs; they can be toxic if inhaled or absorbed through the skin. Only ordinary house cleaning, vacuuming, and washing bedding and clothes in hot water are needed. Only dead or dying lice are found on clothing, bedding, or furniture.
- Iowa Dept. of Public Health Reviewed 08/10

Oskaloosa School Recommendations:

Usually there is no need for children to be sent home or to miss school when lice are detected. In the case of a severe infestation, the school nurse may send a student home to be treated.

- A daily comb-out using a lice comb is an inexpensive and effective treatment option. Consult your school nurse for more information.
- Treatment should be started before returning to school the next day.
- We recommend parents check their children's hair at least weekly.