

Tips for the Detection and Prevention of Head Lice Infestation

One of the most frustrating things about head lice is that it can spread easily and quickly through head-to-head or hand-to-hand contact with an infested person. Any item that is used by a person with head lice, especially if it touches the head or shoulders, can become the source of a head lice infestation. To reduce the risk of spreading head lice within the household, or to prevent a reoccurrence in those who already have head lice, here's what you need to do:

1. Become a head lice detective

- The best way to detect an infestation is to routinely check your child's head for head lice and their eggs (called nits).
- The main symptom of head lice is intense scalp itching, but you can have head lice without itching.
- Check those at risk, especially children aged five to twelve. Girls may be affected more than boys because girls are more likely to share combs, hair accessories, and clothing.
- Head lice is prevalent year round. The most common months of head lice infestations are August to November.

2. Check for nits (lice eggs)

- Nits are tiny and whitish in color, so you may mistake them for dandruff. But unlike dandruff, they will not brush or blow from the hair.
- Check for nits in bright light.
- Use a magnifying glass to help detect head lice and nits.
- Check the entire head, but pay close attention to the scalp. In particular, lift and separate hairs behind the ears and at the nape of the neck, as this is where head lice tend to gather.

3. Get smart about prevention – teach your child not to share personal items

- Combs, brushes, and headgear are some of the most common items that carry head lice from one person to another.
- Pillows, bed linens, hats, headphones, and bicycle and sports helmets can carry head lice.
- Encourage your child to share toys and books, but to keep some belongings personal and store them in a backpack if there are no private cubbies in the classroom.

4. If head lice are already in the household, take a clean sweep – clean your home thoroughly

- All personal head gear (hats, hair ribbons, helmets, etc.), scarves, coats, towels, and bed linens should be cleaned by machine washing in hot water then dried using the hot cycle of a dryer for at least twenty minutes.
- Personal articles such as clothing, bedspreads, blankets, pillows, or stuffed animals that cannot be washed should be dry-cleaned or sealed in a plastic bag for a period of two weeks.
- Personal combs and brushes should be cleaned by soaking in hot water above 130°F for five to ten minutes.
- Vacuum everywhere. It is recommended that all rooms and furniture used by infested-household members be thoroughly vacuumed. Vacuum all carpets, mattresses, upholstered furniture, and car seats.