



Infection Prevention & Control

Fact Sheet

LICE

What are Lice?

Lice are small (the size of a sesame seed) and difficult to find. These wingless insects live on the scalp and other hairy areas of the human body. They survive by sucking the blood of the host. Female lice lay 6 eggs, or nits, every 24 hours. The nits are more visible and appear as small silvery/white ovals firmly attached to the hair shafts. Nits hatch in approximately 8-9 days. Nits must be laid by live lice. You cannot "catch nits".



What are the signs and symptoms of Lice?

The main indication of lice is a persistent itchy scalp. The scratch marks can often become reddened and rash-like. If left untreated, excoriations can become infected.

How does it spread?

Anyone can get lice no matter how clean or careful they are. Lice **cannot jump or fly** and therefore need to be directly transported from one person to another (e.g. head to head contact). Transport can occur on any object that comes in contact with infected body hair and can include clothing, hats, towels, combs, brushes and bedding. Human lice cannot survive on animals and therefore, pets cannot transmit lice.

How are Lice treated?

There are several special medicated shampoos available to treat lice and should be used according to the directions provided. The two most common agents used are Permethrin (Nix™ or Kwellada-P™) and Lindane 1% (PMS-Lindane, Hexit™). Nits may not always be affected by these products and must be removed by hand using a fine tooth comb and/or tweezers. Any items that have been in contact with body hair should be thoroughly washed in hot, soapy water. This includes clothing, bedding, brushes, combs, and hair accessories. Lice rarely survive off the body for longer than 36 hours. Nits will not hatch when temperatures are greater than 38°C or lower than 24°C, therefore they will not hatch if they are not on a human body.

You can learn more about lice at www.headlice.org/faq/lousology

How are Lice prevented?

Heads should be checked regularly if lice are suspected. Avoid the sharing of hats, towels, brushes, combs and hair accessories. If lice are found, use appropriate treatment methods and notify anyone who may have been in direct contact with the infested person.