

## RDS Head Lice FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions)

There is a lot of information about lice detection, treatment, and policies on the internet. Redwood Day School follows information provided on HeadLice.org, which was created by The National Pediculosis Association (NPA). RDS does not endorse or stand by any service or product that claims to get rid of head lice and suggests that you contact your own physician or health care provider for more specific treatment advice.

### What are head lice?

Head lice (*Pediculus humanus capitis*) are a parasitic insect that lives on the scalp of human beings. They feed on blood and travel between humans by crawling alone. Lice do not fly or jump and can live only 6 to 24 hours away from the head.

Lice produce an epoxy-like cement that glues newly laid eggs (nits) to the hair shaft. Lice nymphs hatch from eggs after a 7 to 10 day incubation period, reach maturity ~10 days after hatching, and live for an additional 30 days as adults. Once a female louse is fertilized it is fertile throughout its life cycle and can lay 3 to 6 eggs every 24 hours.

### Where do lice come from?

They have existed since the beginning of recorded history. Desiccated head lice and nits have been found on the scalps of Egyptian mummies, and lice were present in the new world long before Columbus. They have been passed from human to human for thousands of years. They travel between all socio-economic groups and are not associated with poor hygiene, and should in no way be a cause for embarrassment.

### What do lice and nits look like?

A nit (louse egg) is a smooth, oval shaped structure which is attached to the side of the hair shaft ranging in color from off-white to brown and is slightly smaller than a sesame seed. Nits are always the same shape; they are never irregular, fuzzy, or encircling the hair (although the glue that the louse produces may be seen to encircle tightly around the hair shaft). The glue attaches the nit to the hair and makes it difficult to dislodge. They can be pulled off with fingertips or fingernails, but do not move by shaking or moving the hair.

Lice move fast and are often harder to see than nits. Lice are clear in color when hatched (nymph), then quickly develop a reddish-brown color after feeding. Lice are about the size of sesame seeds and have six legs with claws.



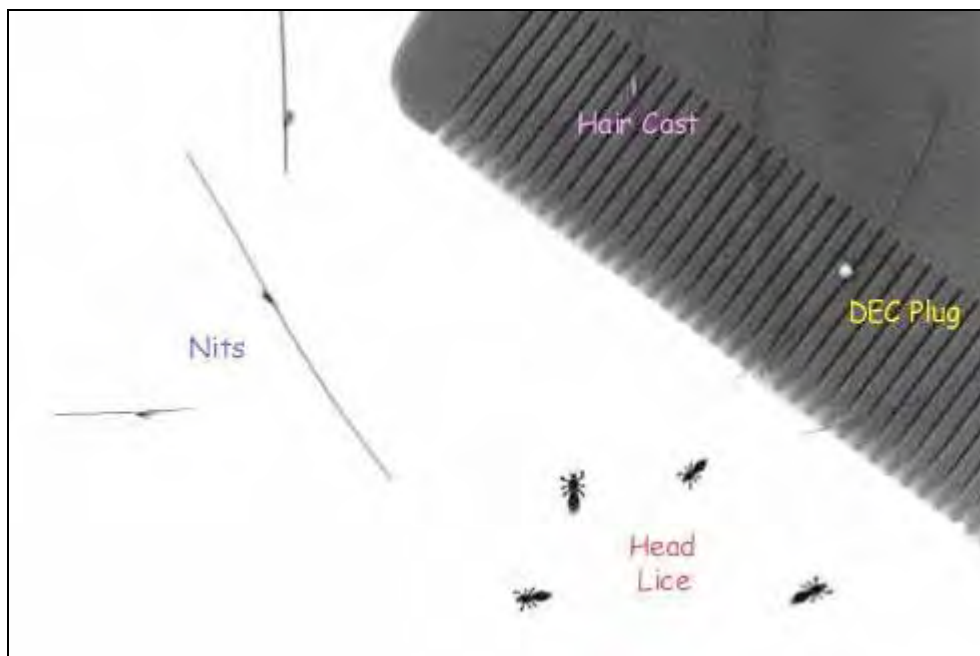
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

### When is a Nit Not a Nit?

Head lice eggs (nits) are small (the size of a pinhead) and oval. Nits may be confused with common hair debris. This debris is often referred to as DEC plugs and hair casts.

DEC plugs (desquamated epithelial cells) may occur when oil glands in the scalp work to compensate for the drying effects of chemical treatments. They are bright, white, irregularly shaped clumps of fat cells stuck to the hair.

Hair casts are thin, elongated, cylinder-shaped segments of dandruff which encircle the hair shaft and are easily dislodged.



### Looking for head lice/nits – Quick Check/Screen (~ 5-10 minutes, depending on amount and type of hair)

**Quick Screening is for times when you do not have lice or nits; it should be performed on a weekly basis.**

- Using a regular hair comb, systematically look through dry, detangled hair, in sections.
- The sections do not need to be very thin sections, but can be small clumps of hair that you separate and look through quickly.
- Look close to the scalp and out 1 inch on the hair shaft.
- Look for nits (the eggs of the head louse), which are small yellowish-white, oval-shaped eggs that are "to the side of a hair shaft glued" at an angle. The nits are often easier to see than the live lice, which move fast.
- The live lice are clear in color when hatched, then quickly develop a reddish-brown color after feeding. Lice are about the size of sesame seeds and have six legs.
- Check for nits 1-2 times a week for 2-3 weeks after your child has had a potential exposure.
- Check your child at least weekly as long as they are in the susceptible age group (3-13 years of age).

## Looking for and removing head lice/nits – Thorough Check (~ 30-40 minutes, depending on amount and type of hair)

*The thorough check is needed if you had nits or lice within the last 2-3 weeks or if your child has been in very close contact with a child who has lice.*

Lice can crawl and hide. The most effective way to find them is to follow these steps:

- Comb any type of hair conditioner on to dry, brushed (detangled) hair. Hair conditioner does not kill lice, but it slows down the louse making it easier to remove from the head.
- Comb very thin sections of the hair with a fine tooth, head lice comb. For best results, comb systematically in one-inch sections. Keep the combed sections separated from the non-combed hair with hair clips.
- Wipe the conditioner from the comb onto a clean area of a paper towel or tissue.
- Look on the tissue and on the comb for lice and eggs.
- Repeat the combing for every part of the head.
- Check 1-2 times a week for nits for 2-3 weeks. You must be nit-free for at least 15 days before you can be certain you are lice free.

For the checks, it is helpful to set up an area with very good light, the necessary supplies (trash can, nit comb, hair clips, regular comb to separate and brush hair, etc.), a magnifying glass or reading glasses, comfortable chair(s), and something to entertain the child.

### Why do I have to keep checking for lice and nits?

In order to reduce the population of parasites quickly, there is a need to check for nits and lice continuously. Continuous checks on specific days will reduce the number of newly emerging nymphs that were not detected in the previous check.

On day 0, eggs newly laid by pregnant females, will not be visible. By day 5, (second check) these eggs will have grown in size and will be easier to detect. It is at this stage of the life cycle, nymphs will be emerging from egg's, and will become a mature adult in 10 day's and ready to start the cycle of life, again.

By checking on day's 0,5,9 and 15 the parasites life cycle is broken. This reduces the population of emerging nymphs and decreases the number of nymphs maturing to the reproductive stage. By day 15, there shouldn't be live lice or nits found. If nits are still found, then this indicates there is still a pregnant louse laying eggs.

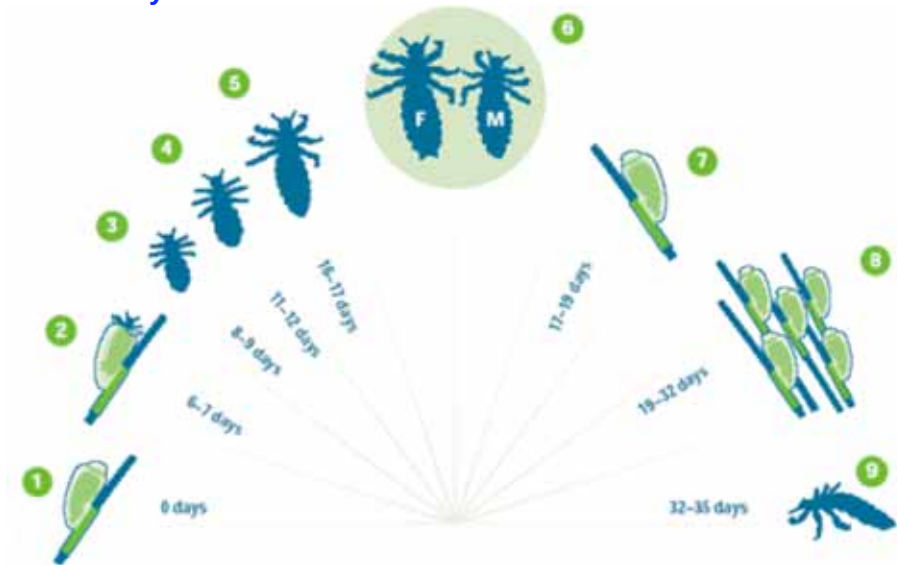
Day 0 = The day lice is discovered. Remove all visible nits. Kill/remove all live lice.

Day 5 = Second check. Remove all nits. Kill/Remove any live lice either missed on day 0 or ones that are newly hatched.

Day 9 = Remove any nits. By this day, live lice should not be found.

Day 15 = If any nits are found, there are live adult lice present on head. Continue checking/removing for another week.

## The Life Cycle of Head Lice



An egg (nit) is laid on hair shaft.

A louse hatches after 6-7 days.

It is considered an adult louse ~10 days after hatching.

An adult female and male louse begin to reproduce.

The female lays first egg 1 or 2 days after mating.

Female can lay approximately 3 to 6 eggs per day for the next 16 days.

Having lived 32 to 35 days the louse dies.

### What are the possible treatments?

1. Manual removal of the live lice and nits is the safe alternative and a necessary component of any head lice treatment regimen.
2. Over-the-counter pediculicides.  
There are no over-the-counter or prescriptive treatments to kill lice that are totally safe and scientifically prove to be 100% effective against head lice and nits. These treatments are potentially harmful pesticides and reliance on them promotes repeated use and contributes to ongoing infestations, outbreaks and resistant strains of head lice.
3. Various natural/organic remedies.  
***Call the RDS Lice Buster Contacts (see the RDS Lice Tip Sheet) for more detailed information on various treatments.***

### If one member of the family has head lice, should all members be treated regardless of whether or not they have head lice?

Family members who are not infested should not be treated. Check everyone's hair for eggs. Check 1-2 times a week for 2-3 weeks. Dogs, cats, and other animals are not susceptible to lice. Lice feed on humans alone. Do not treat your pets.

### **What is the best way to clean my house?**

Wash exposed sheets, towels, and clothing, and dry on hot cycle for at least ½ hour. Combs, brushes, barrettes should be soaked in 130° F water for at least 15 minutes. Vacuum the car, home, and furniture that may be in contact with those who are infested. You can also put blankets, comforters, pillows, stuffed animals and other items in a dryer for 30 minutes or put them in a separate room/area (without human contact) for 2 days. This is a sufficient amount of time since an adult louse cannot live for more than 24 hours without feeding on a human head, and nits that are off the head may not even hatch because they need human warmth to incubate. A nit hatching off of a head results in tiny nymph head louse which, without an accessible/nearby human, is doomed because it requires an immediate blood meal. Experts used to suggest bagging items such as stuffed animals for a number of weeks to help bring infestations under control; however, since lice cannot survive without human blood, this is unnecessary.

### **Should I use sprays or bombs?**

Lice are not an environmental issue, with the exception of the tropics. It is not necessary to use sprays or bombs in the home or car. The Center for Disease Control and the National Pediculosis Association do not recommend the use of pesticides in the home due to potential unnecessary toxicity.

### **Preventing head lice**

There is no product available that is proven to prevent head lice.

Doing a quick check/screen once a week will help you detect any head lice early.

Tying back or braiding hair can help prevent the spread of head lice.

Remind your children not to have head to head contact with others (hugging, whispering in each other's ears) and not to share coats, hats, scarves, hairbrushes, headbands, hairbands, etc.

Using peppermint sprays may deter lice.

Using peppermint or tea tree oil shampoos may deter lice.