

# Fact Sheet

## Head Lice



### What is Head Lice?

Head lice are small insects about the size of a sesame seed (1/8 inch long). They crawl very fast, but they cannot jump or fly. They live in the hair on the head and feed on blood through the skin of the scalp. Lice eggs (nits) hatch about one week after being laid and they can reproduce in two weeks.

### How is it spread?

Anyone can get head lice. They are transmitted by direct contact with an infested person or their personal belongings, such as clothes, bedding, hair brushes, combs, and head wear. Lice spread from person to person by crawling.

### What should I look for?

A child or adult may complain that their head itches or you may notice frequent scratching of the head. Check their hair under a bright light. Lice are not always seen, but can appear as a quickly crawling bug. Nits are very small, white/silver gray (or brown) oval shaped eggs, firmly "glued" to the hair shaft. Nits are not easily removed from the hair. They are often found around the ears, forehead and back of the neck.

### How is it treated?

Head lice can be treated with "over the counter" lice killing shampoos or alternative treatments, such as vegetable oil or olive oil. Check with your health care provider before using any treatment if you are pregnant or treating a child less than 2 years old. All members of the household should be checked and treated if they have head lice. **Treatment does not kill all nits/eggs. All nits/eggs must be combed or picked out.** Remove the nits/eggs ("nitpick") as soon as possible after treatment. Wash all bedding, towels and clothing, including hats, jackets, scarves and other clothing worn within the past 7 days. Clothing that cannot be washed may be dry cleaned or run through a hot dryer cycle. Leather clothing and plush toys can be stored in a plastic bag for 10-14 days. Soak combs, brushes and hair accessories in hot soapy water or clean with a lice shampoo. Vacuum upholstered chairs, couches, mattresses, rugs and vehicles. Change vacuum cleaner bag when done. Insect sprays are not necessary. After each treatment, checking the hair and combing with a nit comb to remove nits and lice every 2-3 days may decrease the chance of re-infestation. Continue to check for 2-3 weeks to be sure all lice and nits are gone.

## Prevention:

Check hair daily for 2 weeks, then weekly.

Don't share hair care items, hats, hair accessories, helmets, earmuffs or headphones.

Wash hair frequently and brush thoroughly.

Keep long hair tied up or pulled back.

Wash coats, hats, brushes and combs frequently.



***For more sources of information on this topic visit:***

ST. CLAIR COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT [www.scchealth.co](http://www.scchealth.co)

CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)

MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES [www.michigan.gov/mdhhs](http://www.michigan.gov/mdhhs)