



Louse Life-cycle and Treatments/Management

Head lice are insects adapted to live on the human scalp. There are also body lice and pubic lice. Pets are not carriers of lice.

Lice feed on human blood and cannot survive for more than a day at room temperature without it. The nymph (young louse) hatches from a nit (egg) that has been glued to a hair shaft after about 8 days of development and reaches adulthood 9-12 days after hatching. A female louse lays 6-10 eggs/day for 3-4 weeks. The itchiness due to lice saliva and/or feces may not be noticed for 4 weeks after infestation.

Several treatment options exist. Because the egg is resistant to some treatments, a second treatment is often required 7-10 days later to target the nymphs that hatch after the initial treatment. Pediculocides (i.e. Nix, Rid, prescription lindane) are usually effective at killing lice; it may take several hours for them to die. CDC discourages retreatment if a few live lice are found 8-12 hours after treatment. Pediculocides are less effective at killing eggs, except prescription Malathion, which has more egg-killing activity. Directions for use should be followed carefully.

Mechanical removal of lice and nits is time consuming but is very helpful in reducing the chance of re-infestation. Louse or nit combs can be used daily on clean hair.

There are many home remedies suggested by parents to treat lice, i.e.; suffocate the lice and nits with petroleum jelly, mayonnaise or oil; loosen the glue that holds the nit on the hair shaft with vinegar so it can be washed away; kill lice and nits with curling irons or blow dryers. However, none of these are scientifically proven to be effective. Some home remedies can be dangerous or flammable, causing burns/injury and should not be used. Pediculicide spray, fumigant sprays or fogs are not recommended- they can be toxic or absorbed through the skin.

Every person in the home should be checked to see if live lice are present, and **only** those found to be infested should be treated. Wash clothes and bed linens that were worn/used in the past 2-3 days using hot water and dry using the high heat drying cycle. Combs and brushes should be cleansed by running them through the dishwasher. Vacuum the floor and furniture in the areas recently used (2-3 days) by the infested person. Call your school nurses for further assistance: 847-367-4120.