



## Head Lice

**HEAD LICE DESCRIPTION** — The head louse is a tiny, grayish-white insect. Female head lice typically live for about one month and lay 7 to 10 eggs (called nits) per day. The eggs are attached to the base of a hair, near the scalp. The eggs hatch after about eight days.

After the eggs hatch, the nits become easier to see. Since the nits are firmly attached to the hair, they move away from the scalp as the hair grows. Head lice do not jump or fly, and they cannot spread from person to person by attaching to pets.

Direct contact with the hair of a person with lice (hair to hair contact) is thought to be the most common method of spreading head lice. It is unclear how much contact with objects used by people with head lice, such as clothing, bedding, combs, or brushes, contributes to the spread of head lice.

Head lice often affect children. In one study, approximately one of every four elementary-age students in the United States had head lice.

**“SUPER LICE” Many people are concerned about super or resistant lice. None of these have been identified in our area to date.**

**HEAD LICE SYMPTOMS** — Most people with head lice do not have any symptoms. Some people feel itching or skin irritation of the scalp, neck, and ears. This is caused by a reaction to lice saliva, which the lice inject into the skin during feeding.

**HEAD LICE DIAGNOSIS** — Head lice are diagnosed by examination of the scalp and hair. Special "nit combs" can be used to assist with the diagnosis.

- Before using the fine-toothed comb, use a regular brush or comb to remove tangles. This can be done while the hair is wet or dry. If the hair is wet, apply hair conditioner to make the hair easier to comb.
- Place the fine-toothed comb at the top of the head, touching the scalp. Pull the comb through the hair from roots to ends. After each stroke, carefully examine the comb for lice or eggs.
- Comb the entire head at least twice

**Finding eggs (nits) without lice does not necessarily mean that there is an active infestation; nits can be found for months after lice are treated.** Because lice lay eggs at the base of the hair shaft, the identification of nits within ¼ inch of the scalp suggests (but does not confirm) an active infestation .

Lice can be more difficult to see than nits since they can move and hide from view. A doctor or nurse can examine the head under a special lamp, which causes nits to glow a pale blue color. If you are unsure whether your child has lice, make an appointment for your child to be examined before you start treatment.





Finding head lice can be upsetting to children and parents, but it is important to keep the following in mind:

- Head lice are not a sign of being dirty or sick
- You can get rid of head lice with proper treatment
- There are no serious or long-term health problems associated with head lice

**HEAD LICE TREATMENT** — There are several options for getting rid of head lice, including creams and liquids, and combing. It is important to follow directions carefully to be sure that the treatment works.

If you are sure that your child (over age two years) has head lice, you can use a nonprescription lice treatment (see '[Insecticides](#)' below). Examine family members and close contacts at the same time and treat them if needed. If your child is under age two years, contact the child's doctor or nurse for treatment advice.

**Insecticides** — A topical insecticide (pediculicide) is a substance, usually a lotion or gel, that is applied to the scalp to kill lice. Available insecticides at Bad River Pharmacy include:

- [Permethrin](#) (Nix, Rid)
- [Spinosad](#) (Natroba) (Office visit and prescription required)
- Topical [ivermectin](#) (Sklice) (Office visit and prescription required)  
(Availability can depend on your insurance's preferred medicine.)

Follow the manufacturer's instructions for applying the insecticide carefully. We recommend starting with permethrin.

- Wash the hair with shampoo, rinse it, and towel-dry it. Do not use conditioner or combined shampoo/conditioner for this washing..
- Apply the insecticide cream or gel liberally to the scalp and leave on for 10 minutes before rinsing with water.
- The treated person should put on clean clothes after the medicine has been applied and rinsed out.
- Have them wait 1 to 2 days after treatment to wash and condition their hair.
- If a few slower moving lice are seen 8 to 12 hours after treatment, do not retreat at this point. The medicine may take longer to kill all the lice. Comb the dead and live lice out of the hair with a fine tooth comb.
- If after 8 to 12 hours there are no dead lice and the live ones are still as active as before, the medicine may not be working. Consult with your health care provider at this point.
- Nit combs that often come in the packaging of the permethrin can be used to remove nits and lice from the hair. Many flea combs made for cats and dogs also work well.





- After treatment, combing the hair with a nit comb every 2 or 3 days may decrease the chance of re-infestation. Continue to check for 2 to 3 weeks to be sure all nits and lice are gone.
- A second treatment is sometimes needed with [permethrin](#) 9 days after the first treatment. This is to kill any lice that may have hatched from nits after the first treatment before they are able to lay any new eggs.

Treatment with [spinosad](#) should be repeated if live lice remain after seven days.

Topical [ivermectin](#) is given as a single treatment; patients should consult with a healthcare provider before repeating treatment. Nit combing is not required with ivermectin, although fine tooth combing may be used to remove treated lice and nits.

**Wet-combing** — Wet-combing is a way to remove lice from the hair with careful and repeated combing. It is a good option for treating very young children or if you want to avoid using insecticides. However, wet-combing is time consuming and must be repeated multiple times over a period of a few weeks.

Wet the hair and add a lubricant, such as hair conditioner or cream rinse, vinegar, or olive oil. See above for a description of how to wet-comb (see '[Head lice diagnosis](#)' above). The combing session should take 15 to 30 minutes, depending how long and thick the hair is. Comb every three to four days for two weeks AFTER you find any large, adult lice.

**PREVENTING HEAD LICE SPREAD** — Adults and children who live with a person diagnosed with lice should be examined for lice and treated if needed. Anyone who sleeps in the same bed should be treated for lice, even if no lice or eggs are found.

School policies differ about whom at a school, if anyone, needs to be informed when a child has lice. A confidential call or visit with the school nurse is a good place to start. **Most experts believe that children with head lice do not need to be removed from school.**

Clothing, bedding, and towels used within 48 hours before treatment should be washed in hot water and dried in an electric dryer on the hot setting. Dry cleaning is also effective. You can use a vacuum to clean furniture, carpet, and car seats. Items that cannot be washed or vacuumed can be sealed inside a plastic bag for two weeks. Soak brushes and combs in hot water (at least 130 degrees F) for 5-10 minutes. Items that the person used more than two days before treatment are not likely to be infested because head lice cannot survive off the body for more than 48 hours. You do not need to have your home sprayed for lice.

