

Head Lice

What are head lice?

Head lice are small insects that live in human hair. They need human blood to live and multiply, and can live up to 3 days off the human body and up to 30 days on a person's head. Having head lice does not mean that you are not clean.

How do they spread?

They do not jump or fly, they spread by crawling very quickly. Lice spread from close head-to-head contact with an affected person and by sharing things that are in direct contact with a person's hair (combs, brushes, hair clips, hats, scarves, helmets, towels, pillows, coats).

What are the symptoms of head lice?

Head lice can cause an itchy scalp. Very tiny eggs lay close to the scalp. They may look like dandruff but are firmly glued to the hair and can't be flicked off.

Checking for head lice

Look carefully through the hair for live lice and nits. Lice move fast and are hard to see so you may just see movement rather than the actual lice. Lice are usually found close to the scalp, at the bottom of the neck, and behind the ears.

Treating head lice

Lice treatment is free for Ontario residents 24 years and under through OHIP. Talk to your pharmacist for more information.

There are various products on the market to treat lice, including insecticides and non-insecticides. Your pharmacist will be able to recommend the best product for you.

Home remedies such as mayonnaise, petroleum jelly, olive oil, etc. are not proven methods to kill lice. There is no evidence that tea tree oil or aromatherapy work either. Never use gasoline or kerosene to kill lice, these products are dangerous.

Disinfecting the house

Because head lice don't live long off the scalp, there is no need for extra cleaning. You do need to get rid of lice or nits from items that touch the head like hats, pillowcases, combs and brushes.

Wash items in hot water and dry them in a hot dryer for at least 15 min; or

Store the items in an airtight plastic bag for 2 weeks. Use a Zip-Lock type bag that is airtight, or tape a garbage bag to tightly seal it.

Head lice and school

Children with head lice should be treated and then attend school or child care as usual.

