

Head Lice

Date:

Dear Parent/Guardian,

Today we discovered that a child at child care has **head lice** and/or nits (louse eggs). While head lice do not spread any disease, they pass easily from child to child, are uncomfortable, and are best dealt with right away. Your child must be free of lice and nits before returning to child care (according to Washington state regulations).

What are head lice?

- Head lice are tiny insects that live on the scalp and crawl through the hair. They are gray, brown, or black and can be difficult to see.
- Head lice live only on the heads of their human hosts. Lice need human blood to survive and most will die within 24 hours if they can not find a "meal". They do not infest pets, furniture, carpeting or toys, although they may live on these things for a day or so after leaving the scalp of a person with lice.
- Lice lay eggs (nits) on the hair close to the scalp. (Nits have to be on the hair near the scalp in order to hatch.) It takes about a week for the nits to hatch and just 10 days after hatching lice are capable of laying more eggs.
- Nits are oval shaped and most often can be seen in the hair behind the ears or near the neck. They cling to the hair and do not shake off like dandruff or other skin flakes.
- Head lice are not a sign of uncleanliness – they can infect anyone.

What are the symptoms of head lice?

Itching of the scalp is the most common symptom of lice. Nits may or may not cause itching. Hair must be closely examined to see if nits are present.

How are head lice spread?

- Most often, by head-to-head contact with someone who has lice.
- By using a hat, clothing, comb, brush, or bedding of someone who has lice.
- More rarely, by placing the clothing worn by someone who has lice close to the clothing of others (as in a coat closet).

How do I treat lice and nits?

Talk to your health care provider about treatment options for head lice. These include nontoxic treatments and insecticide shampoos. *(Please read on for more information on these options.)*



Non-toxic treatments

Non-toxic treatments slow down lice and may make it easier to comb out lice and nits. These products are insecticide-free, can be used as often as needed, and most are considered safe for all ages. There is not much scientific information on how well they work, but many people find them effective.

- Non-toxic water-based products are available at some pharmacies; apply as directed on package and follow combing instructions below.
- Some people find olive oil or mayonnaise to be effective as well.

Steps to take with olive oil or mayonnaise:

- Apply thickly to hair.
- Cover hair with disposable shower cap; leave in place for at least 30 minutes.
- Follow combing instructions below.
- Wash hair with regular shampoo when finished.
- Consult a health care provider if treatment is not effective.

Combing Instructions

Careful combing can be time consuming, but is **effective and safe**. A lice comb with metal “teeth” about 2 inches long (such as Licemeister® or LiceOut®) is necessary for most hair types. (These can be boiled between uses.) Combing should be done every 3-4 days (or more frequently) for at least 2-3 weeks.

Steps to take with combing:

- Allow yourself enough time to do a good job. It may take an hour or more if the hair is long and thick. Work in good light.
- Talk to your child (or whoever’s hair you are going to comb). Explain what you are going to do in a calm voice.
- Place a towel between the hair and shoulders of the person with head lice.
- Part the hair into small sections – about one-inch square –and pin the hair sections with clips to allow you to work with one section at a time.
- Start with one section of hair. Put the comb into the hair near the scalp and pull it all the way through to the end of hair.
- If nits remain attached to the hair shaft, comb through the section again.
- After each comb-through, dip the lice comb in hot water and wipe it with a paper towel, tissue, or toilet paper. Put used paper towels, tissues, or toilet paper into a plastic bag.
- Continue combing until all sections are done.
- Wash the comb well in extra-hot (130° F) soapy water.
- Wash the towel and clothes the person wore during the combing as described below.
- Wash hands completely when done.



Insecticide Shampoos

Permethrin (Nix) is the safest of the pesticide shampoos, according to the American Academy of Pediatrics. **It can be toxic if used too much, so follow instructions carefully.**

- The shampoos kill lice on the scalp and hair.
- **They should not be used more often than recommended by the manufacturer, even if they don't appear to be working.** They can be poisonous if used too often or incorrectly. **Carefully read and follow package instructions and warnings**, including age restrictions. Permethrin should not be used on infants under 2 months old.
- Combing to remove residual lice and nits is not medically necessary after treatment with an insecticide shampoo, but Washington state regulations require that children be lice and nit free before returning to child care. You may need to comb to remove dead nits. For older children, ask your child's school for its policy.
- **Insecticide shampoos do not always work, sometimes because lice are resistant to them** or the shampoos are incorrectly used. Consult a health care provider if the treatment is not effective.

What else do I need to do?

- Check other household members for lice for 21 days, and consider ongoing weekly checks through the year. Treat other family members who have lice.
- Do not treat someone if you do not see live lice or nits in their hair.
- Wash all combs or brushes used by the person in extra-hot (130° F) soapy water.
- Wash all clothing, (including coats, hats, scarves), and bedding used by the person with lice in the 2 days prior to treatment in extra-hot water (130° F) or put in a dryer on high heat for at least 30 minutes. Dry clean items that are not machine washable.
- Pack non-washable items in a sealed plastic bag for 2 weeks to kill any lice that may have been dislodged onto those items.
- Vacuum upholstered furniture, carpets, bicycle helmets, sports helmets, and upholstered car seats used by the person(s) with lice in the 2 days prior to treatment. Don't overdo it – lice are usually spread head-to-head, and are rarely transmitted through other objects.
- Do not use lice or insecticide sprays! They are not effective and may cause toxic or allergic reactions.

Notify your child care if you find lice or nits on your child's hair. Your child may return to child care when lice and nits have been removed.

