

Quick Guide for Managing Head Lice

Management and treatment of head lice includes:

1. Careful inspection and screening of the hair and scalp to identify lice and/or nits correctly.
2. Use of a pediculicidal (head lice) product if live lice or viable nits are found.
3. Cleaning of personal items and the environment.
4. Repeat treatment with the pediculicidal product following the label instructions. If the label does not provide a guide for a second treatment, repeat treatment nine days following the initial treatment.



1. Careful inspection of the hair and scalp to identify lice and/or nits correctly.

Lice are tiny insects (about the size of sesame seeds) ranging in color from red to brown, yellow, tan, gray, white, or black. They attach their eggs (nits) to the hair shaft near the scalp with a glue-like substance. The nits are small, about the size of a knot of thread, and can be white, tan, pale gray, or yellow in color. Nits can be hard to see, so it is important to take your time and separate the hair into thin sections. The nits are most commonly found at the nape of the neck and behind the ears, but can be anywhere, so check the entire head.

A person is infested with head lice if live lice or nits on the hair shaft closer than one quarter inch from the scalp are found.

All individuals living with an infested person, as well as those who have head-to-head contact with the person, should be screened for lice.

2. Use of a pediculicidal (head lice) product if live lice or viable nits are found.

When someone is infested with head lice, he or she should be treated with a medicated hair product that will kill the lice (a pediculicide). Pediculicides are not meant to be used for prevention.

There are many lice treatment products available, which can be found at area drug stores or grocery stores. Most non-prescription pediculicidal products contain permethrin 1% or pyrethrin (such as Nix or RID¹¹). Permethrin 1% is recommended as the first choice of treatment. Once you have selected a product, it is very important that you follow the label directions on the product EXACTLY to treat those who are infested.

Treat only those people with live lice or nits less than one quarter inch from the scalp. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends treating anyone who shares the same bed with those who are infested.

Prescription pediculicides are also available. For further information on pediculicidal products, contact your local public health department, healthcare provider, clinic, or pharmacy.



Before using the product, review all safety statements on the label. Do not use the product if any of the precautions apply to you or the person being treated. Consult with a healthcare provider for further instructions. Using a head lice treatment product will not prevent you from getting head lice.

¹¹ Use of a brand name does not endorse the specific product. A similar product may work as well as those mentioned.

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3. Cleaning of personal items and the environment.

No special cleansers, sprays, or chemicals are needed for cleaning your home.

Soak hair care tools in hot water (130°F) for at least 10 minutes. Heat may damage some plastic combs and brushes. Place these items in a sealed bag for two weeks.

To kill lice and nits, machine-wash all washable clothing and bed linens that have been used by the infested person(s) during the two days before treatment. Use the hot water cycle during the washing process. Dry laundry using high heat for 30 minutes.

Washing clothes to remove lice and nits is only necessary on the day of treatment and does not need to be repeated daily.



Another option is to place the item in a hot dryer for 30 minutes, if the recommended care label approves use of dryers.

Articles that cannot be machine washed, or placed in a hot dryer can be vacuumed, dry cleaned, or stored in a sealed plastic bag for two weeks.

Floors, carpets, upholstered furniture, pillows, and mattresses should be vacuumed to pick up any hairs that may have living lice or nits attached to them.



4. Repeat treatment with the pediculicidal product following the label instructions. If the label does not provide a guide for a second treatment, repeat treatment nine days following the initial treatment if live lice or nits within one quarter inch of the scalp are found.



The use of lice sprays for the house can be dangerous and is not recommended.