



HEAD LICE - how to get rid of them

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Infestation is usually transmitted through direct head-to-head contact, for instance, during play. Lice may also spread through material in contact with hair—such as combs, hairbrushes, towels, scrunchies, and headpieces—but the significance of these indirect infestations is slight. Lice infestation is not due to lack of hygiene, and neither does the cleanliness of the environment or hair affect the probability of infestation.

Combing with a lice comb is the surest way to verify infestation

The most common symptom of infestation is itching of the scalp, but there may be no symptoms at all, which is why family members and other people in close contact with the infested person shall check whether they are infested or not. Infestation is best verified by combing dry or wet (conditioner-treated) hair according to the instructions below. Pharmacies sell lice combs. The responsibility for verifying and treating head lice rests with the homes.

Combing wet hair

- Wet the examined person's hair and dry it lightly with a towel.
- In order to facilitate combing, put on some hair conditioner.
- Brush or comb out the tangles with a strong-tooth brush or comb.
- Comb the hair backward and part it in the middle.
- Start combing with a lice comb at the forehead and move toward the neck one lock at a time.
- Comb each lock from the base and progress along the scalp toward the bottom.
- After checking each lock, wipe the lice comb with kitchen tissue and look under bright light whether head lice remain on the comb or kitchen tissue. When required, use a magnifying glass.
- Move each checked lock away. Progress systematically until you have checked half the hair from the forehead to the neck. Then, apply the same procedure to the other half.

Combing dry hair

- Bend the examined person over a table and let his/her elbows rest on the table. Let the hair hang over the head.
- Put a piece of white paper on the table.
- Brush or comb out the tangles with an ordinary comb or brush.
- Start combing the hair from either side with a lice comb.
- Comb the hair with a lice comb from the neck to the forehead, all the way to the end of each lock.
- Check under bright light whether any head lice have fallen on the paper on the table. When required, use a magnifying glass.

Video on combing:
<http://www.vantaa.fi>
keyword: head-lice video

Infestation is certain if just one live head louse is found in the hair

In addition, lice eggs are usually an indication of infestation. Nevertheless, keep in mind that dead lice eggs often remain in the hair even after treatment.

Only the infested are treated; you can buy the medication at pharmacies

All family members shall be screened for head lice (= combing the hair with a lice comb), but only the infested people are treated. All the infested people should be simultaneously treated—preferably, during the same day. Medication given just in case or preventive treatments are not useful.

Pharmacies sell several products, some of which are effective, while the effectiveness of some products is not certain. The products that contain dimethicone usually work best. Traditional medicated shampoos (Prioderm® and Nix®) are usually effective, but lice's resistance to them has increased.

Regardless of the product used, treatment shall be repeated after 7-10 days; combing the hair is of utmost importance

The first treatment does not necessarily destroy all the lice eggs, so it is possible that more lice will hatch from the remaining nits. Nits hatch within 10 days from laying, and systematic and repeated use of a lice comb during this period may prevent infestation. If no live lice are found after the second treatment, the treatment was successful, even if lice eggs still remain in the hair. If, however, live lice are found, the treatment must be repeated, but this time, with another lice medication. Combing should be continued at one-week intervals for a few weeks.

Absence from school or day care is not required

Infestation with lice is no cause for a child's absence from day care or school, and the child does not need to be sent home in the middle of the day. The child can return to day care or school after the first treatment.

Extra cleaning is not required

Outside a human body, lice lose their capacity for reproduction within 1-2 days at the latest, so that no extra cleaning is required at home or day care. The primary thing is to ensure the cleanness of material in contact with hair.

- Material in contact with the infested person (brushes, combs, towels used to dry the hair, headpieces, etc.) should not be used for two days or they should be cleaned on a daily basis: brushes and combs are cleaned by soaking them in hot (+60°C) water for 30 seconds. Ordinary machine wash is sufficient for items that can be laundered.
- Pillowcases should be changed after each treatment.
- It is not necessary to clean other clothes, linen, furniture, carpets, car seats, etc.
- Fumigant sprays should not be used.

More information on head lice:

Head lice are 1—4-mm long, grayish-translucent, wingless insects that move in the hair fairly fast. The color of lice that have recently fed on blood is reddish brown. Lice do not jump or fly; they can barely move on hairless and smooth surfaces. In order to move, lice need hair with a minimum length of 5 mm.

Lice do not vanish from hair of their own accord: left untreated, they keep on multiplying. They use human blood as nourishment and live for approximately one month. During that time, a female lays 100-300 eggs, from which a new generation of lice hatches after around seven days. Outside a human body, lice can survive no longer than 1-2 days and they lose their capacity for reproduction far sooner.

Lice eggs, i.e., nits, are among hair; they are oval, translucent, farina-like papillae. They are so small—around 0.8 mm long—that they can barely be seen through the eyes. When going through the hair with fingertips, a small unevenness can be felt, which is tightly attached to the hair. Lice eggs are usually found behind the ears, in the neck hair and fringe. Lice eggs are usually situated less than 6 mm from the scalp. When nits hatch, the empty eggshells remain in the hair, and when the hair grows, the shells become more visible. Based on the situation of the egg, one can deduce whether the egg in question is alive or dead, or an empty shell.

Sources: Kansallinen päätäiasiantuntijaryhmä