

The kids are heading back to school, and so are the head lice!

These lousy vermin get around anywhere people share spaces and belongings, but cannot jump or fly. Instead they crawl from one host to the next through close contact or sharing items like combs, hats, helmets, or clothing. Personal hygiene has nothing to do with the risk of catching head lice, and pets do not spread them either.<sup>1</sup> Having hair make you a susceptible host- and the more hair on your head the greater your risk.

Head lice have 3 forms: The nit, the nymph, and the adult:

**Nit:** These are tiny lice eggs laid by the adult female at the base of a strand of hair. Nits take 8-9 days to hatch. A female can lay 6 eggs a day! The eggs cannot hatch at a temperature lower than your scalp<sup>1</sup>.



**Nymph:** An immature louse, about 9-12 days old, that must feed on blood within hours to survive.

**Adult:** They are about 2-3 mm long with sharp curved claws they use to grip the hair. An adult can survive 30 days on a head, but will die within 2 days without a hairy host.

## Infection Prevention & Control

- Head lice are a nuisance, but they do not spread disease. However, a secondary skin infection may develop due to scratching.
- Use **Standard & Contact isolation precautions** for 24 hours after effective treatment has begun.
- Body lice and pubic lice are different organisms from head lice. Both require **Standard Precautions**.
- The body louse *is* known to spread disease: Epidemic Typhus, Trench Fever, and epidemic relapsing fever.

## Treatment:

It is important to follow the directions on anti-lice treatment products carefully. Leave it on for the recommended number of hours (often 8-12), and let dry naturally. Rinse and comb hair, and use a second application if directed. Conditioner acts as a barrier to lice treatment and reduces its effectiveness, so don't apply it. Wash and dry belongings on high heat or seal in plastic bags for 2 weeks.

<sup>1</sup>Centers for disease control and prevention. (2013, September 24). Parasites. Retrieved August 20, 2018, from <https://www.cdc.gov/parasites/lice/head/index.html>