



**Parkway Schools
Head Lice Information for Parents**

Head lice are a common problem in school-age children. It can take up to two weeks for head lice infestation to become apparent. This information may help decrease the risk of your child becoming infested or give you the information you need to treat head lice in your child.

What are lice?

Head lice are small, light to dark brown insects no larger than the size of sesame seeds. The female head louse lays eggs, called nits, on the hair shaft close to the scalp. These nits, which look like tiny whitish ovals, are firmly glued to the hair shaft and usually hatch within two weeks. Nits are most often found in the hair behind the ears and at the back of the head and neck. Nits should not be confused with dandruff. Dandruff can be easily flicked off the hair; nits cannot because they are firmly attached to individual hairs.

Anyone can get head lice. They are not a sign of being dirty and should not be considered a sign of an unclean house. Although head lice do not jump, they can spread from one person to another. School-age children and their families are likely candidates for head lice because it spreads through close contact. Tell your child that he/she should not share personal items such as hats, combs, brushes, pillows or bike helmets, because these items can transmit lice. Head lice do not cause any diseases to humans.

If you suspect head lice, check your child's head closely. Head lice may be hard to locate because they move to avoid light. Nits may be easier to find. If left untreated, head lice will quickly increase in number, so you have to be sure to treat it as soon as it is detected.

What can I do?

The [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) recommend the following treatment for head lice:

General Guidelines

Treatment for head lice is recommended for persons diagnosed with an active infestation. All household members and other close contacts should be checked; those persons with evidence of an active infestation should be treated. Some experts believe prophylactic treatment is prudent for persons who share the same bed with actively-infested individuals. All infested persons (household members and close contacts) and their bedmates should be treated at the same time.

Some pediculicides (medicines that kill lice) have an ovicidal effect (kill eggs). For pediculicides that are only weakly ovicidal or not ovicidal, routine retreatment is recommended. For those that are more strongly ovicidal, retreatment is recommended only if live (crawling) lice are still present several days after treatment (see recommendation for each medication). To be most effective, retreatment should occur after all eggs have hatched but before new eggs are produced.

When treating head lice, supplemental measures can be combined with recommended medicine (pharmacologic treatment); however, such additional (non-pharmacologic) measures generally are not required to eliminate a head lice infestation. For example, hats, scarves, pillow cases, bedding, clothing, and towels worn or used by the infested person in the 2-day period just before treatment is started can be machine washed and dried using the hot water and hot air cycles because lice and eggs are killed by exposure for 5 minutes to temperatures greater than 53.5°C (128.3°F). Items that cannot be laundered may be dry-cleaned or sealed in a plastic bag for two weeks. Items such as hats, grooming aids, and towels that come in contact with the hair of an infested person should not be shared. Vacuuming furniture and floors can remove an infested person's hairs that might have viable nits attached.

Treat the infested person(s): Requires using an Over-the-counter (OTC) or prescription medication. Follow these treatment steps:

1. Before applying treatment, it may be helpful to remove clothing that can become wet or stained during treatment.
2. Apply lice medicine, also called pediculicide, according to the instructions contained in the box or printed on the label. If the infested person has very long hair (longer than shoulder length), it may be necessary to use a second bottle. Pay special attention to instructions on the label or in the box regarding how long the medication should be left on the hair and how it should be washed out.

WARNING: Do not use a combination shampoo/conditioner, or conditioner before using lice medicine. Do not re-wash the hair for 1–2 days after the lice medicine is removed.

3. Have the infested person put on clean clothing after treatment.
4. If a few live lice are still found 8–12 hours after treatment, but are moving more slowly than before, do not retreat. The medicine may take longer to kill all the

- lice. Comb dead and any remaining live lice out of the hair using a fine-toothed nit comb.
5. If, after 8–12 hours of treatment, no dead lice are found and lice seem as active as before, the medicine may not be working. Do not retreat until speaking with your health care provider; a different pediculicide may be necessary. If your health care provider recommends a different pediculicide, carefully follow the treatment instructions contained in the box or printed on the label.
 6. Nit (head lice egg) combs, often found in lice medicine packages, should be used to comb nits and lice from the hair shaft. Many flea combs made for cats and dogs are also effective.
 7. After each treatment, checking the hair and combing with a nit comb to remove nits and lice every 2–3 days may decrease the chance of self-reinfestation. Continue to check for 2–3 weeks to be sure all lice and nits are gone.
 8. Retreatment is meant to kill any surviving hatched lice before they produce new eggs. For some drugs, retreatment is recommended routinely about a week after the first treatment (7–9 days, depending on the drug) and for others only if crawling lice are seen during this period. Retreatment with the prescription lindane shampoo is not recommended.

Supplemental Measures: Head lice do not survive long if they fall off a person and cannot feed. You don't need to spend a lot of time or money on housecleaning activities. Follow these steps to help avoid re-infestation by lice that have recently fallen off the hair or crawled onto clothing or furniture.

1. Machine wash and dry clothing, bed linens, and other items that the infested person wore or used during the 2 days before treatment using the hot water (130°F) laundry cycle and the high heat drying cycle. Clothing and items that are not washable can be dry-cleaned or sealed in a plastic bag and stored for 2 weeks.
2. Soak combs and brushes in hot water (at least 130°F) for 5–10 minutes.
3. Vacuum the floor and furniture, particularly where the infested person sat or lay down. However, the risk of getting infested by a louse that has fallen onto a rug or carpet or furniture is very small. Head lice survive less than 1–2 days if they fall off a person and cannot feed; nits cannot hatch and usually die within a week if they are not kept at the same temperature as that found close to the human scalp. Spending much time and money on housecleaning activities is not necessary to avoid reinfestation by lice or nits that may have fallen off the head or crawled onto furniture or clothing.
4. Do not use fumigant sprays; they can be toxic if inhaled or absorbed through the skin.

None of the treatments are 100% effective and it is very common for it to take a few weeks to completely resolve a head lice infestation. Remember to check all family members and treat those with any signs of head lice. For persistent cases that do not respond to 2 or 3 consecutive weekly treatments of the over-the-counter lice shampoo,

prescription medications are available. Contact your health care provider for more information.

Parkway Schools Protocol

When a child is identified with an active head lice infestation at school, the child's parents are notified of the suspected infestation and provided with information about treatment. Students will be sent home at the end of the day and may return to school after they have received appropriate treatment at home. After the student has been treated, the student should return to school. School nurses will work with families to ensure eradication of the lice infestation by conducting periodic head checks until completely resolved. Parkway follows the recommendation of the American Academy of Pediatrics and does not exclude students from school because of lice or nits.

Please know that we share your concern about head lice. If you detect head lice in your child, please let the school nurse know. Parkway school nurses will alert parents and guardians when there is an unusual clustering of head lice cases, while still seeking to protect the privacy of individual students. By working together, we can successfully eliminate head lice. Please feel free to contact your school nurse if you have any questions.

Resources for more information

Centers for Disease Control

<http://www.cdc.gov/parasites/lice/head/index.html>

Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services. *Prevention and Control of Communicable Diseases: A Guide for School Administrators, Nurses, Teachers, Child Care Providers, and Parents or Guardians.*

<http://health.mo.gov/safety/childcare/pdf/PreventionandControlofCommunicableDiseases.pdf>

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