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Head Lice

Also called: Pediculosis

Head lice are parasitic wingless insects. They live on people's heads and feed on their blood. An adult louse is about the size of a sesame seed. The eggs, called nits, are even smaller - about the size of a knot in thread. Lice and nits are found on or near the scalp, most often at the neckline and behind the ears.

Lice spread by close person-to-person contact. It is possible, but not common, to get lice by sharing personal belongings such as hats or hairbrushes. Children ages 3-11 and their families get head lice most often. Personal hygiene has nothing to do with getting head lice. Head lice do not spread disease.

Symptoms are

- Tickling feeling in the hair
- Frequent itching
- Sores from scratching
- Irritability and difficulty sleeping. Head lice are most active in the dark.

Treatment is recommended for people who have an active infestation of head lice. All household members and other close contacts should be checked and treated if necessary. Some experts also recommend treating anyone who shares a bed with an infested person. It is important to treat everyone at the same time.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Start Here

- [Head Lice \[https://familydoctor.org/condition/head-lice/?adfree=true\]](https://familydoctor.org/condition/head-lice/?adfree=true) (American Academy of Family Physicians)
Also in Spanish [<https://es.familydoctor.org/condicion/piojos-de-cabeza/?adfree=true>]
- [Head Lice \[https://www.aad.org/public/diseases/contagious-skin-diseases/head-lice\]](https://www.aad.org/public/diseases/contagious-skin-diseases/head-lice)
(American Academy of Dermatology)
- [Head Lice: Frequently Asked Questions \(FAQs\) \[https://www.cdc.gov/parasites/lice/head/gen_info/faqs.html\]](https://www.cdc.gov/parasites/lice/head/gen_info/faqs.html)
(Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)
Also in Spanish [<https://www.cdc.gov/parasites/lice/head/es/informativa/preguntas.html>]

Diagnosis and Tests

- [Head Lice: Diagnosis \[https://www.cdc.gov/parasites/lice/head/diagnosis.html\]](https://www.cdc.gov/parasites/lice/head/diagnosis.html)
(Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)
Also in Spanish [<https://www.cdc.gov/parasites/lice/head/es/diagnostico.html>]


Prevention and Risk Factors

- **Head Lice: Prevention and Control** [<https://www.cdc.gov/parasites/lice/head/prevent.html>] (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)
Also in Spanish [<https://www.cdc.gov/parasites/lice/head/es/prevencion.html>]

Treatments and Therapies

- **Head Lice: Malathion Frequently Asked Questions** [https://www.cdc.gov/parasites/lice/head/gen_info/faqs_malathion.html] (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)
- **Head Lice: Treatment** [<https://www.cdc.gov/parasites/lice/head/treatment.html>] (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)
Also in Spanish [<https://www.cdc.gov/parasites/lice/head/es/tratamiento.html>]
- **Head Lice: Treatment Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)** [https://www.cdc.gov/parasites/lice/head/gen_info/faqs_treat.html] (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)
Also in Spanish [https://www.cdc.gov/parasites/lice/head/es/informativa/preguntas_tratamiento.html]

Clinical Trials


- **ClinicalTrials.gov: Head Lice** [<https://clinicaltrials.gov/search/open/condition=%22head+lice%22>]  (National Institutes of Health)

Journal Articles

References and abstracts from MEDLINE/PubMed (National Library of Medicine)

- **Article: Detection of bacterial pathogens including potential new species in human...** [<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/28931077>]
- **Article: Getting Ahead of Head Lice: Treatment in the Setting of...** [<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/28806014>]
- **Article: Acaricidal, pediculicidal and larvicidal activity of synthesized ZnO nanoparticles using...** [<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/28760358>]
- **Head Lice -- see more articles** [[https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed?term=\(lice+infestations\[mh\]+OR+pediculus\[mh\]\)+AND+humans\[mh\]+AND+english\[la\]+NOT+\(letter\[pt\]+OR+editorial\[pt\]+OR+case+reports\[pt\]\)+AND+%22last+1+Year%22\[edat\]](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed?term=(lice+infestations[mh]+OR+pediculus[mh])+AND+humans[mh]+AND+english[la]+NOT+(letter[pt]+OR+editorial[pt]+OR+case+reports[pt])+AND+%22last+1+Year%22[edat])]

Find an Expert

- **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention** [<https://www.cdc.gov/>]
Also in Spanish [<https://www.cdc.gov/spanish/>]
- **National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases** [<https://www.niaid.nih.gov/>] 

Children

- **Head Lice (For Parents)** [<https://kidshealth.org/en/parents/head-lice-sheet.html>] (Nemours Foundation)
- **Head Lice: Information for Parents** [<https://www.cdc.gov/parasites/lice/head/parents.html>] (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)
- **Lice Aren't So Nice** [<https://kidshealth.org/en/kids/lice.html>] (Nemours Foundation)
Also in Spanish [<https://kidshealth.org/es/kids/lice-esp.html>]

- Pediculosis Capitis (Head Lice) [<https://www.skindsight.com/skin-conditions/child/pediculosis-capitis-head-lice?lmiw9cApI>] (Logical Images)

Patient Handouts

- Head lice [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/000840.htm>] (Medical Encyclopedia)
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/ency/article/000840.htm>]
- Treating Head Lice [<https://www.fda.gov/forconsumers/ucm171730.htm>] (Food and Drug Administration)



MEDICAL ENCYCLOPEDIA

Head lice [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/000840.htm>]

Related Health Topics

Lice [<https://medlineplus.gov/lice.html>]

Parasitic Diseases [<https://medlineplus.gov/parasiticdiseases.html>]

National Institutes of Health

The primary NIH organization for research on *Head Lice* is the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases [<http://www.niaid.nih.gov/>]

Other Languages

Find health information in languages other than English [<https://medlineplus.gov/languages/headlice.html>] on *Head Lice*

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