



Children's Head Lice: What Are Your Treatment Options?

If you have had a young child attending a childcare center, preschool or elementary school, chances are that you've had to deal with head lice. In these settings, children commonly pass around and share clothing, hair brushes, hats and decorative hair pieces. The sharing of these items can cause lice to spread through a classroom.

Lice are tiny insects that feed on blood. What may begin as a minor irritant on the scalp, on the back of the neck or behind the ears can grow into an infestation that requires immediate treatment by a physician.

If you suspect your child has lice, there are many effective, non-prescription options to try. You can also remove the tiny eggs using a specially designed lice comb. If the symptoms do not go away quickly or worsen, or if a suspected infection develops, call a doctor immediately.

Recent media attention has focused on whether common head lice treatments can potentially cause more harm than good. "Many medicines that treat lice can be harmful if overused or used improperly" says the WebMD Medical Reference.

Lice shampoos are available over the counter or by prescription. One controversial option is to use a product containing lindane. Lindane is a potentially harmful pesticide. Efforts are underway in many states, including Michigan, to protect children from pharmaceutical lindane. It has already been banned for all purposes in California and 53 countries. The Michigan Department of Community Health does NOT recommend the use of lindane¹. There are several options available that are less-toxic or non-toxic for lice removal.

SAFER ALTERNATIVES

Petroleum jelly, olive oil, Cetaphil, mayonnaise, or other oil-based products can obstruct the breathing of Lice, and potentially suffocate the egg. To use, massage onto the entire surface of the hair and scalp, cover with a shower cap, and leave on overnight. Residue removal may take repeated, vigorous shampooing over several days. For more information, visit <http://mnceh.org/campaigns.lindane.php>

¹Michigan Department of Community Health. Michigan Head Lice Manual. July 2004.

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FAST FACTS

There are three kinds of lice:
body, pubic and head.

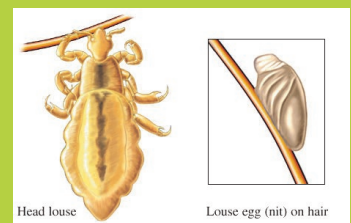
Lice spread easily through close personal contact or through the sharing of clothing items.

Lice cannot fly or jump nor will they clear up or go away without treatment.

Thoroughly wash all brushes, linens, clothing and other items that have come into contact with the affected individual. This also helps to eliminate the spread of lice to others.

Use the safest hot water setting on your washer for linens.

Pollution Issues, a website based in the U.K., has excellent information on head lice. See <http://www.pollutionissues.co.uk/hair-lice-products.html>



Head louse

Louse egg (nit) on hair

photo from WebMD.com

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