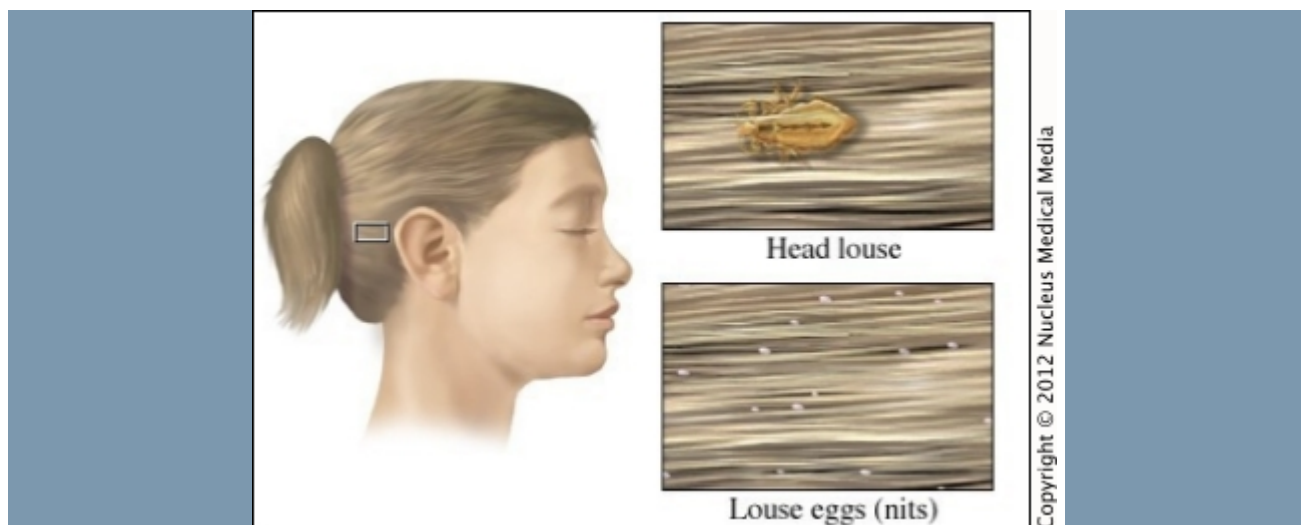


Head Lice

Overview

What are head lice?

Head lice are small wingless insects (bugs) that can get on your hair and scalp. Lice are parasites (say: "pah-ruh-sytes"), which means that they feed on very small amounts of your blood. Lice bites may cause constant scratching and lead to skin irritation or even infection.



Symptoms

What are the signs of head lice?

Because lice move very fast, they are not always easy to see. Here's what you can watch for:

- Frequent scratching
- Small red bumps or sores on the scalp, neck and shoulders
- Lice eggs, also called nits, which look like tiny, oval shaped, white or clear dots. Nits usually stick at an angle on hair shafts.

If you think someone in your family has head lice, it's probably best to check everyone in the family. If you're not sure, your family doctor can help diagnose head lice.

Causes & Risk Factors

Who is at risk of getting head lice?

Anyone can get head lice, but they are more common among school-aged children. Head

lice spread more easily among children 3 years to 12 years of age because they share their belongings more often than adults and play close together.

It's not true that people get head lice because they're dirty. Head lice are very contagious. No matter how many times you or your child takes a shower or washes his or her hair, it's still possible to get head lice from head-to-head contact with someone who is already infested with lice. You can also get head lice if you share hats, towels, pillows, combs or brushes with someone who has head lice.

Treatment

How can I treat head lice?

Head lice can be treated with over-the-counter or prescription products. Over-the-counter shampoos and lotions containing pyrethrin (one brand name: Rid) or permethrin (brand name: Nix) are commonly used to treat head lice. Shampoos and lotions that kill head lice contain pesticides and other chemicals, so it is important to talk to your doctor before using these products, especially if you are pregnant or nursing, or if you have allergies or asthma. It is also not safe to use products with pesticides on or near your eyes. If you find head lice or nits in eyelashes or brows, talk to your doctor.

If over-the-counter products are not effective, your doctor can prescribe a cream, lotion or shampoo to treat your head lice. Certain prescription products are also safer for women who are pregnant or breastfeeding.

The products that kill head lice don't usually kill all nits. To reduce the risk of another lice infestation, pick the remaining lice and nits by hand or by using a special comb (one brand name: LiceMeister comb) to remove them. Comb through all of the hair one section at a time every 3 days or more often, for at least 2 weeks or until you stop seeing head lice and nits.

You should also use hot water to wash any bed linens, towels and clothing recently worn by the person who had head lice. Vacuum anything that can't be washed such as the couch, carpets, your child's car seat and any stuffed animals. Because head lice don't live very long away from the scalp, you don't need to use lice spray on these items.

Prevention

Can head lice be prevented?

It may be difficult to prevent head lice from spreading among children, but the following are some steps you can take to help keep lice away:

- Ask your child not to share combs, brushes or hair decorations.
- Ask your child not to try on hats that belong to other children.
- If your child will be sleeping away from home, be sure to pack his or her own pillow and towels.

Other Organizations

- [CDC Head Lice Information](#)

- National Pediculosis Association

Questions to Ask Your Doctor

- What is the best way to get rid of head lice?
- Should I use a special shampoo?
- Will I need a prescription shampoo?
- How did my child get head lice?
- Should I check the rest of my family for head lice?
- Should I get a special comb?
- How long will it take to get rid of the head lice?
- What should I do at home?
- Should I bring my child back for a follow-up visit?
- Could the head lice come back?

Source

Pediculosis and Scabies by DC Flinders, M.D., and P De Schweinitz, M.D. (*American Family Physician* January 15, 2004, <http://www.aafp.org/afp/20040115/341.html>)

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