

## Procedure for Head-Lice Check

### Where are head lice most commonly found?

Head lice and head lice nits are found almost exclusively on the scalp, particularly around and behind the ears and near the neckline at the back of the head. Head lice or head lice nits sometimes are found on the eyelashes or eyebrows but this is uncommon. Head lice hold tightly to hair with hook-like claws at the end of each of their six legs. Head lice nits are cemented firmly to the hair shaft and can be difficult to remove even after the nymphs hatch and empty casings remain.

### What are the signs and symptoms of head lice infestation?

- Tickling feeling of something moving in the hair.
- Itching, caused by an allergic reaction to the bites of the head louse (only 50% of those affected).
- Irritability and difficulty sleeping; head lice are most active in the dark.
- Sores on the head caused by scratching. These sores can sometimes become infected with bacteria found on the person's skin.

### How to identify head lice:

Misdiagnosis of head lice infestation is common. The diagnosis of head lice infestation is best made by finding a live nymph or adult louse on the scalp or hair of a person. Because adult and nymph lice are very small, move quickly, and avoid light, they may be difficult to find.

#### **Use of a fine-toothed louse comb may facilitate identification of live lice.**

If crawling lice are not seen, finding nits attached firmly within  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch of the base of hair shafts suggests, but does not confirm, the person is infested. Nits frequently are seen on hair behind the ears and near the back of the neck. Nits that are attached more than  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch from the base of the hair shaft are almost always non-viable (hatched or dead). Head lice and nits can be visible with the naked eye, although use of a magnifying lens may be necessary to find crawling lice or to identify a developing nymph inside a viable nit (may look like black specks or pieces of mascara).

Nits are often confused with other particles found in hair such as dandruff, hair spray droplets, and dirt particles. If no nymphs or adults are seen, and the only nits found are more than  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch from the scalp, then the infestation is probably old and no longer active — and does not need to be treated.

If nymphs or adults are seen and nits are found no more than  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch from the scalp, then the infestation is active and does require treatment (see head lice protocol).

### Steps for using a lice comb to check for head lice (Nit Free Terminator Comb recommended):

Note: this method is used for health office individual head checks only.

1. Use a spray bottle to damp the hair at the crown of the head and behind both ears.
2. Place a wet paper towel (white preferred) near you.
3. Swipe 2-3 times through one area of damped hair.
4. Brush off the lice comb on the paper towel to inspect everything that was removed from the hair.
5. Repeat this process in the other areas of damped hair.
6. Place findings on the paper towel in a baggy to show to the parent/guardian.
7. Note that small black or brown particles may be the nymph louse—see pictures on the back side of this page.
8. Clean the lice comb with soap and water, rinse, then place in a baggie in the freezer for 48 hours.
9. When the lice comb is removed from the freezer, rinse it again (everything will be dead).
10. **If debris remains wedged between the tines on the comb, use a plastic tooth flosser to remove it.**

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. <https://www.cdc.gov/parasites/lice/head/treatment.html>

## What do head lice look like?

Head lice have three forms: the egg (also called a nit), the nymph, and the adult.



Actual size of the three lice forms compared to a penny. (CDC Photo)



Illustration of egg on a hair shaft. (CDC Photo)

**Egg/Nit:** Nits are lice eggs laid by the adult female head louse at the base of the hair shaft nearest the scalp. Nits are firmly attached to the hair shaft and are oval-shaped and very small (about the size of a knot in thread) and hard to see. Nits often appear yellow or white although live nits sometimes appear to be the same color as the hair of the infested person. Nits are often confused with dandruff, scabs, or hair spray droplets. Head lice nits usually take about 8–9 days to hatch. Eggs that are likely to hatch are usually located no more than  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch from the base of the hair shaft. Nits located further than  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch from the base of hair shaft may very well be already hatched, non-viable nits, or empty nits or casings. This is difficult to distinguish with the naked eye.



Nymph form. (CDC Photo)

**Nymph:** A nymph is an immature louse that hatches from the nit. A nymph looks like an adult head louse, but is smaller. To live, a nymph must feed on blood. Nymphs mature into adults about 9–12 days after hatching from the nit.



Adult louse. (CDC Photo)

**Adult:** The fully grown and developed adult louse is about the size of a sesame seed, has six legs, and is tan to grayish-white in color. Adult head lice may look darker in persons with dark hair than in persons with light hair. To survive, adult head lice must feed on blood. An adult head louse can live about 30 days on a person's head but will die within one or two days if it falls off a person. Adult female head lice are usually larger than males and can lay about six eggs each day.



Adult louse claws. (CDC Photo)