

## Facts about the louse and the nits

- The louse is a wingless insect with 3 legs and a powerful claw on either side of its chest.
- Lice cannot jump, fly, or swim.
- Lice live for about 30 days and the female can lay over 150 eggs in her adult life.
- The louse feeds on blood from the scalp and then returns to the hair shaft to lay an egg (nit).
- The nit is attached to the hair shaft and does not fall off easily.
- The nit is about the size of a comma on a typewriter.
- Lice have been documented on ancient Egyptian mummies and have been present in North America long before Columbus.
- Lice affects all socio-economic groups. They are not a disease of poverty or uncleanness.
- Any ethnic group may be affected. It is not true that Afro-Americans do not get lice.
- Lice are most common in children, which may be because they are spread through close contact.
- Lice DO NOT SPREAD DISEASE!

## The various products

- Pyrethrins - Clear, Rid, Pronto, etc.
- An over the counter shampoo requiring a 10 minute treatment
- No residual effect
- A second treatment in 10 days is recommended
- Low toxicity
- Not recommended for persons allergic to ragweed
- Use on dry hair.
- Permethrin - Nix, etc.
- An effective and fast creme rinse available over the counter
- Some residual effect, with possible itching or rash as side effects
- A second treatment in 10 days is recommended
- Low toxicity
- Not recommended for persons susceptible to asthma
- Wash hair first, and dry thoroughly before using.
- Lindane - Kwell is no longer available in the US
- Potentially toxic, prescription required

## The process of lice removal

- Inspect all of the family for Lice and treat only those with live lice. None of the products prevent lice.
- Use the shampoo or conditioner according to package directions.
- Pick out every egg (nit).
- Clean the environment.
- Sprays are not recommended as they are expensive and may create more hazards than the lice.
- Wash bed linens, pillows, towels, and clothing in hot water and dry in a hot dryer.
- Put anything that cannot be washed (stuffed animals, foam head pieces, etc.) in a plastic bag for 2 weeks in the freezer.
- Dry-clean any clothing that cannot be washed or place it in the plastic bag.
- Soak combs, brushes, barrettes, etc. in hot water for 15 minutes.
- Check the child's head daily for lice and nits and remove them.
- Use the shampoo or conditioner according to package directions and again in 10 days.

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## Resistance

- Resistance to lice has been documented in a few foreign countries and is possible in the US.
- Usually, however, when lice persist on a child it is due to one of two things:
  1. The child may have been re-exposed to lice.
  2. All of the nits were not removed.
- In the event of persistent lice, (after checking for re-infection and proper nit removal), it is recommended that the treatment be switched to the other chemical used in treatment - Pyrethrin to Permethrin or Permethrin to Pyrethrin.

## Miscellaneous facts and myths

- Never use kerosene or any other flammable product on the hair.
- Be sure that dandruff and hair debris from dry scalp are not confused with nits.
- One cannot distinguish whether a nit is alive or dead by simply looking at it.
- Nits closest to the scalp are probably alive, but with current hair styles, this may not be true in every case.
- Do not use mayonnaise, olive oil, etc. as a substitute for the medicated shampoo or conditioner. These products have no effect on the nits and the infection is delayed, not removed.
- It is estimated that it takes about 4 hours to pick the nits from a little girl's hair.
- Lice do not feed or lay eggs on dogs and cats, but their fur can hold the louse long enough for another child to come in contact with it. Brushing the animal is suggested if lice persist.

***For more information, contact:***

The National Pediculosis Association P.O. Box 610189  
Newton, Massachusetts 02161  
617-449-NITS or [www.HeadLice.Org](http://www.HeadLice.Org).

Franklin County



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