

Parent Resource for Head Lice Treatment Options

Treatment Options Chart

Head lice products should only be used when live lice and/or live nits are found.

| OPTION A | OPTION B | OPTION C | Alternatives |
|--|---|--|--|
| Head Lice Treatment Shampoos or Cream Rinses | Wet Combing with a Special Nit Comb and Regular Conditioner | Head Lice Treatment Spray | Alternative Treatments |
| <p>Works to kill the lice. Nits must be manually removed with daily combing.</p> <p>Ask your pharmacists about head lice products.</p> | You remove the head lice and live nits every 3 days. | <p>Spray kills both lice and nits.</p> <p>Ask your pharmacists about head lice products.</p> | <p>There is no scientific evidence on safety or effectiveness of these treatments.</p> <p>Interior Health cannot recommend alternative treatments.</p> |
| <p>Do not combine treatment options at the same time as this can reduce effectiveness.</p> | | | |

Option A: Using Head Lice Shampoo or Rinse to Kill and Remove Lice and Nits

Head lice products should only be used when live lice and/or live nits (eggs) are found. This option involves using two treatments with a special head lice shampoo or rinse, 7 to 10 days apart. These products are available without a prescription from a drug store. The shampoo or rinse kills the lice on the head but may not kill all of the nits. The nits need to be removed using a special nit comb and by using your fingernails. Resistance and reinfestation can occur. Consult a public health nurse, a pharmacist or 811 for more information.

| DO | REMEMBER |
|---|---|
| <p>1. Check the heads of all family members. Check the entire head, especially behind ears and back of neck. You are looking for live lice and/or live nits (eggs).</p> | <p>1. If one person in the family has head lice, there is a good chance that other family members have head lice too. Head lice move very quickly, but do not jump. Combing hair with a fine-toothed nit comb can help find live lice. <i>Wetting hair prior to combing may help.</i> Nits are glued to the hair; while dandruff can be flicked off the hair. Use good lighting when doing head checks.</p> |
| <p>2. Treat all <u>infested</u> family members the same day.</p> <p>Read and follow the directions of the head lice product carefully.</p> <p>Apply to dry hair.</p> | <p>2. Unless you treat all family members who have head lice at the same time, head lice can be passed on from one person to another when heads touch.</p> <p>Regular conditioners can reduce the effectiveness of treatments. Wash off conditioners and any hair products before starting treatment.</p> |
| <p>3. Remove all dead lice and nits (within ¼ inch or 6 mm of scalp) using a nit comb or your fingernails. Rinse nit comb or fingers in a bowl of warm water and wipe dry after each stroke, or wipe on tissues and throw these away in a sealed bag.</p> | <p>3. Nit combs are available at your local pharmacy. It may help to untangle the hair first by combing with a regular comb.</p> <p><i>Experts differ in their opinion on the need to remove nits. Nit removal is included here as it helps ensure fewer eggs will hatch.</i></p> |
| <p>4. Wash clothing, sheets, towels and pillowcases used in the past 3 days, in water at least 55 C or 130 F and then dry in the <u>hot</u> cycle of the dryer for at least 20 minutes or put the items in a sealed plastic bag for 10 days or in the freezer for 48 hours.</p> <p>Disinfect combs and hair accessories by soaking in rubbing alcohol for 1 hour.</p> | <p>4. There is no reason to do a major clean-up of the house to get rid of head lice. It is more important to treat the head lice and remove the nits.</p> <p>Only items that have been in direct contact with the affected person need to be washed e.g. shirts, jackets, hats, towels, combs, brushes. Vacuum floors, furniture, mattress, and car seat where the infested child has spent time in the last 3 days.</p> |

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| <p>5. Treat a second time 7 – 10 days later. Repeat step 2 and 3 above</p> | <p>5. A second treatment will make sure that any head lice, which hatch after the first treatment, will be killed before they have a chance to lay eggs. Two treatments and a follow-up check of the head with nit removal for 2-3 weeks is the best way to make sure head lice are gone.</p> |
| <p>6. If live head lice or new nits are found consult your Public Health Nurse or pharmacist or try another recommended option.</p> | <p>6. If a few live lice are still found 8–12 hours after treatment, but are moving more slowly than before, this means the treatment is working and the medicine may take longer to kill all the lice.</p> <p>If active live lice are found in the combings after treatment has been properly applied, the head lice may be resistant to the product chemicals.</p> <p>If, after 24 hours following the treatment, no dead lice are found and lice seem as active as before, the medicine may not be working. Do not retreat right away with same product, Wash off the first product and retreat as soon as possible using a product with a different active ingredient group than the one used. Or go to option B or C.</p> <p>Speak with your public health nurse or pharmacist before you try another treatment and carefully follow the treatment instructions contained in the new product box.</p> |

Option B: Wet Combing – Remove the Lice

Wet combing is based on the life cycle of head lice. It is about removing the live head lice from the head. Combing treatments are done every 3-4 days over a three-week period. This breaks the life cycle of head lice by removing them before they are fully-grown and able to lay more eggs. This option is low cost and safe but takes time and requires that the steps below be followed carefully and completely. Talk to your Public Health Nurse if you require further information.

| DO | REMEMBER |
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| 1. Wash hair with regular shampoo and Rinse well. | 1. Note: On average, a wet combing session takes about ½ hour per person. |
| 2. Apply at least ½ cup (125 ml) of regular conditioner (any brand) to cover and wet all of the hair. Do not rinse out the conditioner. | 2. Untangle hair with a regular wide tooth comb. Conditioner will slow the lice down. |
| 3. Comb sections of hair using a fine toothed lice comb. Divide hair into small sections. Firmly draw the comb from the scalp to the end of the hair. After each stroke, rinse the comb in a bowl of warm water, and wipe dry or wipe on tissues and throw tissues away in a sealed bag. Continue section by section until the entire head is done. Make sure hair stays wet with conditioner during combing. | 3. Metal or plastic nit combs are available at your local pharmacy. If the nit comb tugs the hair, use a wide toothed comb first and more conditioner, then try the nit comb again. Make sure to have good lighting. |
| 4. Rinse hair. Leave hair dripping wet. Repeat Step 3 combing <u>without conditioner</u> , until no lice are found. | 4. Check the comb and your fingernails for head lice (you don't want to give them a ride back to the head). |
| 5. Wash clothing, sheets, towels and pillowcases used in the past 3 days, in water at least 55 C or 130 F and then dry in the <u>hot</u> cycle of the dryer for at least 20 minutes or put the items in a sealed plastic bag for 10 days or in the freezer for 48 hours. Disinfect combs and hair accessories by soaking in rubbing alcohol for 1 hour. | 5. There is no reason to do a major clean-up of the house to get rid of head lice. It is more important to treat the head lice and remove the nits. Only items that have been in direct contact with the affected person need to be washed e.g. shirts, jackets, hats, towels, combs, brushes. Vacuum floors, furniture, mattress, and car seat where the infested child has spent time in the last 3 days. |
| 6. Repeat Step 1 – 4 at least every 3-4 days for three weeks. | 6. Follow the schedule below. For head lice and nit images see identifyus.com |

DAYS TO WET COMB: at least **every 3-4 days (or more often)**. **Three weeks of wet combing has been shown to have the better results than just two weeks.**

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| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 |
| 15 | 16 | 17 | 18 | 19 | 20 | 21 |

Option C: Head Lice Treatment Spray to kill Lice and Nits

This option involves using a special head lice spray purchased from a drug store. Two treatments must be used 8-10 days apart. The spray works by suffocating and killing the head lice and nits (eggs).

| DO | REMEMBER |
|---|---|
| <p>1. Check the heads of all family members. Check the entire head, especially behind ears and back of neck. You are looking for live lice.</p> | <p>1. If one person in the family has head lice, there is a good chance that other family members have head lice too.</p> <p>Head lice move very quickly. Combing hair with a fine-toothed nit comb can help find live lice. Wetting hair prior to combing may help. Nits are glued to the hair; while dandruff can be flicked off the hair. Use good lighting when doing head checks.</p> |
| <p>2. Treat all <u>infested</u> family members the same day.</p> <p>Read and follow the directions on the head lice spray carefully.</p> <p>Apply to dry hair.</p> | <p>2. Unless you treat all family members who have head lice at the same time, head lice can be passed on from one person to another when heads touch.</p> <p>Conditioners can reduce the effectiveness of treatment. Wash off conditioners and any hair products before starting treatment.</p> |
| <p>3. Wash clothing, sheets, towels and pillowcases used in the past 3 days, in water at least 55 C or 130 F and then dry in the <u>hot</u> cycle of the dryer for at least 20 minutes or put the items in a sealed plastic bag for 10 days or in the freezer for 48 hours.</p> <p>Disinfect combs and hair accessories by soaking in rubbing alcohol for 1 hour.</p> | <p>3. There is no reason to do a major clean-up of the house to get rid of head lice. It is more important to treat the head lice and remove the nits. Only items that have been in direct contact with the affected person need to be washed e.g. shirts, jackets, hats, towels, combs, brushes.</p> <p>Vacuum floors, furniture, mattress, and car seat where the infested child has spent time in the last 3 days.</p> |
| <p>4. Treat a second time 8 – 10 days after the first treatment. Repeat the treatment, starting at step 2.</p> | <p>4. A second treatment will make sure that all eggs and live lice are killed. Two treatments and a follow-up check of the head is the best way to make sure head lice are all gone.</p> |

When Treatment Doesn't Work

The most common causes of treatment failure include:

Reason #1: Not having enough information about head lice or the treatment methods.

The treatment methods can be confusing for many people, especially Option B which is based on understanding the life-cycle of head lice. If unsure about the treatment or prevention of head lice, please talk to your Public Health Nurse. If unsure about what lice and nits look like see [identifyus.com](https://www.identifyus.com) for images.

Reason #2: The head lice treatment was not applied properly.

The most common errors with using the treatments include:

- The hair had conditioner or a hair product in it before treatment was started. As conditioner and other products can coat the hair, they can make the treatments less effective if they are not washed off first.
- Applying the treatment to wet hair: Applying the product to wet hair dilutes the chemicals in the treatment. When exposed to water, head lice close their breathing holes which also make it harder for the chemicals to penetrate and kill the lice.
- Not using enough treatment to thoroughly cover all the hair: Thick and long hair will require more head lice product. Make sure you use enough head lice treatment to thoroughly wet all hair – especially behind the neck and ears. One way to make sure that you have covered all the hair is to comb the product through the hair with a regular comb.
- Not leaving the treatment on long enough: Chemicals in the treatment take time to work. Make sure you follow the product instructions.
- Not applying the second treatment 7-10 days later: With option A and C you need to use the treatment again 7-10 days after the first treatment. This is because no product kills 100% of eggs and eggs take 7-10 days to hatch. Therefore, re-treatment in 7-10 days is a mandatory part of treatment.

Reason #3: The lice are resistant to the chemicals in the treatment.

Head lice may be resistant to the chemicals in the lice treatment. If this happens, the chemicals are no longer able to kill all the lice. You can tell if the head lice are resistant by treating the head as directed, then checking for live lice. Use a fine tooth comb and look for movement. If the lice are moving less or are all dead the shampoo is working. If the lice are still very active they may be resistant to the chemicals in the treatment. Switch to another product with a different "active ingredient" or try one of the other options listed. Ask your pharmacist for help.

Reason #4: The hair was previously washed using shampoo with built-in conditioner. Conditioners in regular shampoos can coat the hair and make it more difficult for chemicals in the head lice shampoos to cover the hair and scalp.

Reason #5: The nits weren't removed.

No treatment is 100% effective. Nit removal will help ensure effectiveness of head lice treatments and that there will be fewer eggs on the head to hatch. Daily lice combing is a must!

Reason #6: The head lice treatment is too old.

The active chemicals in many treatments weaken over time. Check the expiry date on the product.

Reason #7: Misdiagnosis (no active infestation or it is a case of misidentification); It is easy to mistake hair debris for nits. Nits cannot be flicked off or removed easily; they are cemented onto the hair. Also, symptoms (like itching) may be caused by something other than an active head lice infestation.

Reason #8: Another infestation has occurred.

Re-infestation almost always results from head to head contact with a person who has lice. If hair is clear one week after treatment, then head lice are found later, re-infestation has probably occurred. If you suspect re-infestation, consider direct head to head contact opportunities your child has had with favorite play mates and within the family.

From: Interior Health Website, [School Health Care](#) page.

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| Call 8-1-1 HealthLinkBC BC www.healthlinkbc.ca | Nurse | 24 hours a day | Daily | <i>Call 8 -1-1 to speak with a nurse, ask a dietitian about nutrition, or a pharmacist about your medication.</i> |
| | Dietitian | 9 a.m. – 5 p.m. | Mon – Fri | |
| | Pharmacist | 5 p.m. – 9 a.m. | Daily | |
| | Hearing Impaired | Call 7-1-1 | | |