

Pediculosis is an infestation of head lice, not an infection. It does not pose a significant health hazard and is not known to spread disease. The most common symptom is itching due to sensitization to allergens in lice saliva. Many times there are no symptoms. Occasionally, scratching leads to chafing and secondary bacterial infection requiring treatment with an antibiotic. The public health disease impact from *Pediculosis capitis* is negligible.

Head lice are insects. They are slightly less than 1/8 inch long and light to dark tan in color. Eggs (nits) are laid by the adult female louse and are usually attached to the hair shaft within ¼ inch of the scalp. The smooth, plump, grayish white nits are barely visible to the naked eye. After an egg is laid it incubates on the hair shaft for approximately one week, at which time it hatches. The newly emerged immature louse must obtain a blood meal within 24 hours or it will die. Providing that conditions are suitable for development, the immature louse will reach maturity in 8-9 days. Once maturity is reached, the female louse mates and begins depositing 3-4 eggs per day. During the adult female's 30-day life span, she lays approximately 90 nits. The complete life span from egg to death is approximately 48 days or 7 weeks.

It is important to treat your child before he/she returns to school. Please begin treatment as soon as possible, and then send your child back to school so that they do not miss learning opportunities in the classroom. Also, remember to check everyone in the household and notify anyone your child has had close contact with over the past week. Treat anyone that has live head lice and/or nits within ¼ inch of the scalp. Continuous checking and removal of nits may be required for 3 weeks to avoid reinfestation. The following treatments are recommended:

TREATMENT

1. Insecticide Treatment

Treatment for head lice includes the application of an insecticide shampoo or cream rinse that claims to be effective against head lice. Follow instructions on the product label, or instructions from a private physician or local health department. **No product claims 100% effectiveness in killing all nits.** For this reason, some products require a second shampoo 7 to 10 days after the initial treatment. Since only an examination of a nit under a microscope can determine its viability after treatment, it is recommended that all nits be removed from the hair. Nit removal should begin at the time of treatment. All nits must be removed from the hair within ¼ inch of the scalp prior to return to school. *Repeated treatments are not recommended and should not be carried out unless live lice are found.*

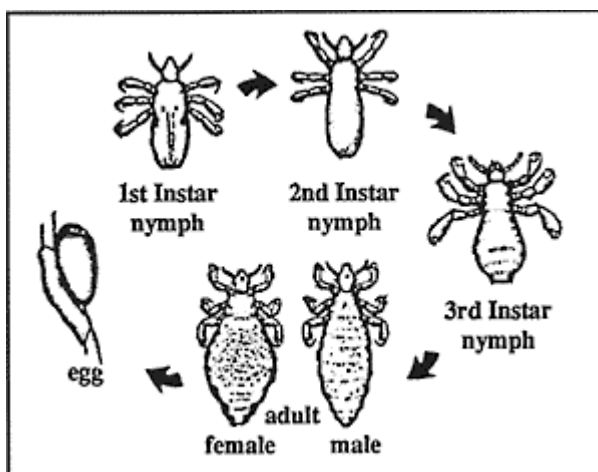
2. Suffocation

The use of food-grade oils and Vaseline can be massaged on the head and covered with a shower cap for 8-12 hours to suffocate the lice. *Caution: Do not use plastic caps while child is sleeping, can cause child suffocation.*

3. Nit Removal

Getting all of the nits (eggs) out is beneficial and eliminates worry of reinfestation.

Vinegar rinse can help loosen the cement that attaches the nit to the hair shaft. Use one part vinegar to four parts water (1:4 ratio) as a hair rinse prior to use of any other treatments to loosen nits.



This picture shows the stages of the head lice life cycle. The head louse progresses from the egg or nit stage to the nymph stage before it finally becomes an adult louse.

It takes about seven days for nits or lice eggs to hatch. Newly hatched lice or nymphs are tiny, no bigger than the size of a pin head when the first hatch. They rapidly grow into mature lice in about one week and can then live up to a month laying up to 8 eggs or nits a day. So it's very easy to see how quickly they can spread and infest a host.

*For further information from the Michigan Department of Community Health, please log on to

http://www.michigan.gov/documents/Final_Michigan_Head_Lice_Manual_103750_7.pdf