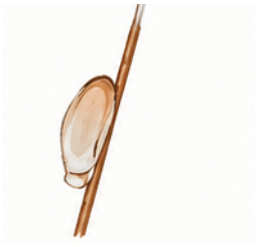
HEAD LICE

Head lice are common among school-aged children. They crawl (they cannot jump or fly) and spread primarily through direct head-to-head or hair-to-hair contact. Head lice do not transmit disease, and having lice is not a reflection of poor hygiene. It is important to remember that transmission does not occur exclusively at school. Lice can also spread during extracurricular activities, sports, sleepovers, playdates, and other social gatherings where children are in close contact.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

NIT (EGG)



Tiny, oval; attached to a hair shaft.

BABY NYMPH



Small newly hatched louse.

NYMPH



Young, six-legged louse.

ADULT



Sesame-seed size; moves quickly.

- Check carefully behind the ears and at the nape of the neck, as these are common areas to find live lice and nits (eggs) attached to the hair shaft close to the scalp.
- Itching is a common symptom of head lice; however, some children may have little to no itching or other symptoms. Keep in mind that dandruff and hair-product residue can sometimes be mistaken for nits.
- **Inspect your child's hair and scalp very carefully.** Both lice and nits are extremely small and can be difficult to detect. Live lice also move quickly, making them easy to miss. Using a fine-toothed metal nit comb and examining small sections of hair can help with detection.

IF YOU FIND LICE

- **Treatment is required before returning to school.** Your child must receive appropriate head lice treatment before coming back to campus.
- **Use an appropriate lice treatment product.** Over-the-counter and prescription treatments are available. Your pharmacist or healthcare provider can help you select the best option. Follow the product instructions carefully. Do not use conditioner before treatment, and avoid washing the hair again for 1–2 days afterward unless otherwise directed.
- **Remove lice and nits with a metal nit comb.** A fine-toothed metal lice comb can help remove live lice and nits (eggs). Cutting or shaving your child's hair is not necessary.
- **Consider a professional lice treatment center.** Several centers throughout the Lowcountry offer thorough screenings and treatment. We strongly recommend considering professional treatment, particularly if you are unfamiliar with identifying or removing lice and nits.

- **Continue checking and combing after treatment.** Use a fine-toothed metal nit comb, such as the Terminator comb, every 2–3 days for 2–3 weeks. Some treatments require a second application approximately 7–10 days later. Always follow the specific product instructions, as recommendations vary by treatment.

THE NIT FREE TERMINATOR METAL COMB



Separate hair into small sections. Comb from the scalp to the ends, wiping the comb after each pass. Metal nit combs can help remove lice and nits; follow manufacturer directions. Combing can take 30-60 minutes per session and may need to be repeated for several days. A comb is helpful, but it does not replace medication when medication is indicated.

This metal comb is also helpful when checking for lice, as it can catch nits that you might miss during a visual check. We strongly recommend combing your child's hair in addition to visually inspecting it.

PREVENTION AT HOME & SCHOOL

- Avoid head-to-head contact during play, sports, sleepovers, and other activities.
- Do not share hats, scarves, hair accessories, combs, brushes, or towels.
- Check household members and close contacts.
- Keep long hair pulled back when practical to reduce hair-to-hair contact.

CLEANING AFTER A CASE

- Wash bedding, towels, and clothing used during the two days before treatment in hot water; dry on high heat (at least 20 minutes).
- Soak used combs and brushes in hot water (at least 130°F) for 5-10 minutes or put in the freezer.
- Dry-clean nonwashable items or seal them in a plastic bag for two weeks.
- Vacuum areas where the affected person recently sat or rested. Extensive cleaning and fumigation are unnecessary.

TREATMENT SAFETY

- Never use gasoline, kerosene, or industrial pesticides on hair or skin.
- Oils, vinegar, shortening, and similar home remedies do not reliably eliminate head lice.
- Use lice medication only as directed; some products can cause mild scalp irritation.
- If live lice remain after 2-3 properly used treatments, contact your healthcare provider rather than repeatedly applying the same product.

WHAT HEAD LICE ARE

- Not an emergency
- Not dangerous
- Not a health risk
- Not able to live more than 48 hours without a host
- Not able to reproduce on pets, carpet, furniture, etc.
- Not a sign of poor hygiene
- Not easily controlled with shampoos alone

WHEN SHOULD I CONTACT THE SCHOOL?

If you discover live lice or nits, email nurse@portergaud.edu. Your child must begin appropriate treatment before returning to school.

SOURCES

SC Department of Public Health: Head Lice

CDC Head Lice Treatment

American Association of Pediatrics: Head Lice: What Parents Need to Know

This handout is for general parent education. Follow the instructions for the specific treatment product and consult your child's healthcare provider with questions.