



## School Health Advisory: HEAD LICE

**“Lice crawl. They need to have close contact with a person’s scalp in order to infest another person. They do not cause any illness or carry any diseases. The American Academy of Pediatrics and the National Association of School Nurse’s state that a child should not miss or be excluded from school because of head lice.”**

***Michael Rokosky, M.D.***

**Michael Rokosky, M.D.  
School Medical Advisor  
City of Waterbury, CT**

### THE BUGS

- Lice are a type of mite. One lice is called a louse.
- There are 3 different types of lice: head lice, body lice, and pubic lice.
- Head lice are the most common and they are most often seen in school age children and their families. About 6 to 12 million children get head lice every year.
  - The bugs are small, the size of a sesame seed (2-3mm).
  - They are usually pale gray but their color can vary.
  - Head lice feed on blood from the scalp. They can live 1 to 2 days without a blood meal.

### THE BITES

- The lice bite all over the scalp but especially around the hair line and behind the ears.
- It may take up to 4 to 6 weeks before the scalp becomes sensitive to the lice saliva and start to cause intense itching.
- Lice do **NOT** cause any illness or carry any disease.

### THE LIFE OF A LOUSE

A louse lives about 28 days. They develop in 3 phases: (1) Egg or nit; (2) Nymph; (3) Adult louse.

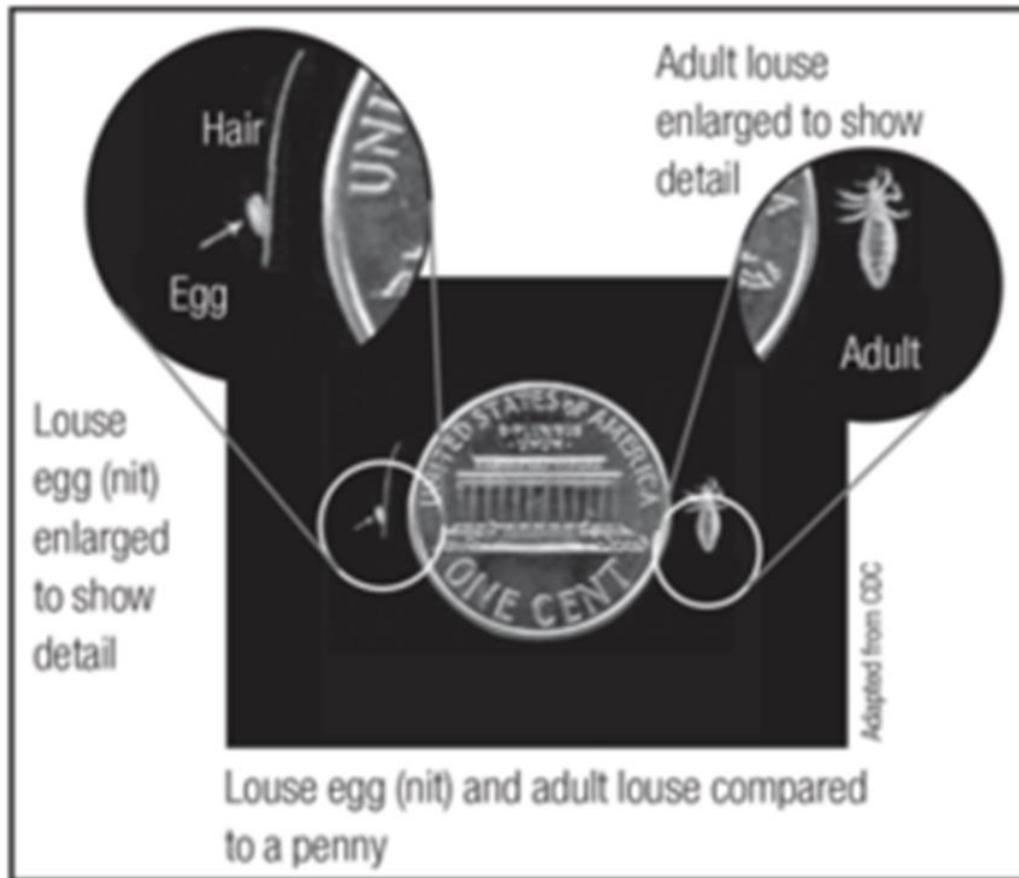
### NITS:

- Lice lay 6 to 10 eggs or nits a day.



DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH  
**THE CITY OF WATERBURY**  
CONNECTICUT

- They attach their eggs to hair shafts with a sticky glue like substance that holds the nit firmly in place close (4 to 6mm) to the scalp.
- Nits are the size of a pinhead.
- Nits are oval in shape.
- Nits are white or yellow.
- Nits hatch in 6 to 9 days and become adults in 12 to 14 days.
- After hatching the shell, also called a nit, remains attached to the hair shaft.
- Nits may be confused with dandruff or hair spray casts.



**NYMPH:**

- A nymph is a baby louse.
- After hatching, a nymph feeds on blood from the scalp.
- Initially they are the pinhead size (1.5mm) but grow into adults in 7 to 12 days.
- They can move quickly and avoid light.



### **ADULT LOUSE:**

- They have 6 legs with claws at the end that allow them to latch on to hair shafts tightly.
- Typically adults live 30 days when stuck to a human's head but if they fall off, they die within 1 to 2 days.

### **SYMPTOMS**

- Itching is the most common symptom.
- It may take up to 4 to 6 weeks before the scalp becomes sensitive to the lice saliva and the skin begins to itch.
- Itching occurs most often at the hairline and behind the ears.
- The itching can continue for weeks after the lice are gone.

### **CATCHING LICE**

- Lice crawl. They do **NOT** jump, hop, or fly.
- They spread from close contact – head to head or by sharing items – combs, brushes, hats, headphones, or coat collars hung together on racks.
- Head checks are the way to diagnose lice:
  - Seat the child in a brightly lit room.
  - Part the hair.
  - Look for crawling lice or nits in one section of the scalp at a time until you have looked at the entire scalp.

### **TREATING LICE**

- Head lice medication should only be used on children that have been identified as having live lice.
- The child's doctor should be consulted before starting any medication.
- Use medication only as directed. Check that the medication is age appropriate.
- Most over the counter lice medications are not effective because the lice have developed resistance to them.
- The child's doctor can order prescription medication that is very effective and some of them will even cover both lice and nits.

### **REFERENCES**

1. Head Lice: What Parents Need to Know: <https://www.healthychildren.org/English/health-issues/conditions/from-insects-animals/Pages/Signs-of-Lice.aspx>
2. Head Lice: How to Tell If You Have Them: <https://www.webmd.com/skin-problems-and-treatments/skin-conditions-lice>