

## HEAD LICE FAQ'S

- **DID YOU KNOW...** that head lice are tiny bugs that live on the scalps of humans? They get around by crawling from hair to hair. **DID YOU KNOW...** Like mosquitoes, they bite through human skin (the scalp) and feed on blood. Unlike mosquitoes, they do not inject a venom that makes you itch, but some kids get inflammation at the bite, which can cause itching - it can take several bites to produce this reaction, so kids may have lice for several weeks before they complain of itching, and some kids may never experience itching. **THAT'S WHY...** it's important to check your kids periodically for head lice, even if they don't complain of itching.
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- **DID YOU KNOW...** that nits are the eggs of head lice? They are about the size and shape of a sesame seed. They are glued to the hair shaft, usually within about an inch of the scalp, where it's warmer. They can range in color from creamy white to darker brown to clear, depending on whether there is a live nymph inside or not. They are hard to remove from the hair - they don't slide off easily. Nits that are further down the hair shaft (more than an inch from the scalp) usually are not carrying nymphs that can survive. It can be hard to identify nits - other things that may look similar are dandruff, dried hair gel or spray, dust or lint, other tiny bugs that may land on the head, and hair follicle castings.
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- **DID YOU KNOW...** that lice and nits are usually found in the hair at the nape of the neck and behind the ears, although they can be anywhere on the head?
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- **DID YOU KNOW...** that only about 20% of kids who have nits (eggs) in their hair will go on to develop live lice? **THAT'S WHY...** we don't send kids home when we can find only nits in their hair.
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- **DID YOU KNOW...** that 20-30% of nits (eggs) can survive a first treatment with a lice-killing product? **THAT'S WHY...** you must treat again in about 10 days, to kill any emerging nymphs ("baby" lice) that survive the first treatment.
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- **DID YOU KNOW...** that it's important to pull as many nits as you can out of your child's hair after treating them? This makes it much easier to tell if/when they develop more nits, and helps you decide if you need to treat again. It also makes the child feel better.
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- **DID YOU KNOW...** that the common cold is far more "catchy" than lice?
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- **DID YOU KNOW...** that by the time we can find live lice in a child's hair, they've probably had them for about a month? **THAT'S WHY...** we allow kids to stay in school for the rest of the day, and ride the bus home, if parents can't pick them up when we find live lice. **AND THAT'S WHY...** you have to be a real "detective" to figure out where your child may have gotten lice in the first place. Think back to places where they've spent time over the past month or so - babysitters, playmates, church, sports teams, relatives (including parents who they just visit), sleepover parties, etc.

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- **DID YOU KNOW...** that head lice can't jump or fly? They can only crawl from head to head. **THAT'S WHY...** kids rarely "catch" head lice at school - much closer contact is needed for them to "pass it on".
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- **DID YOU KNOW...** that head lice don't discriminate? They like dark or light hair; curly or straight hair; clean or dirty hair. They are not necessarily a sign of poor hygiene. They like to live on the heads of wealthy people, as much as people from families with less money. They live on the heads of city people, or country folks.
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- **DID YOU KNOW...** that Nix (permethrin) and RID (pyrethrin) are the only head lice treatments you can buy without a prescription that are approved by the FDA? Others have ingredients such as rosemary or dimethicone, and claim to work, but may not...
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- **DID YOU KNOW...** that head lice have co-existed with humans for millions of years? **AND...** that you cannot get them from animals? Only from other humans.
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- **DID YOU KNOW...** that school-wide head checks don't help school nurses find kids with head lice? **THAT'S WHY...** we just check kids who are scratching, or say they're head is itching. Research has shown that works just as well.
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- **DID YOU KNOW...** that head lice do not carry any diseases that can harm us? They're really more of a nuisance than a health problem. (Compare this with mosquitoes, which can carry encephalitis; or deer ticks, which can carry Lyme disease.) However, their bites can cause inflammation of the scalp, and even sores. These sores can become infected. **THAT'S WHY...** it's important to really try to get rid of them, even if this takes several treatments.
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- **DID YOU KNOW...** that vacuuming your upholstered furniture, carpets, beds, pillows, car upholstery, etc. is just as effective as spraying them with expensive lice-killing products? **JUST MAKE SURE...** you take out the vacuum cleaner bag right away, seal it up in a plastic bag, and get it out of your house immediately.
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- **DID YOU KNOW...** that your school nurse is a real expert about head lice? **THAT'S WHY...** you can ask her about how to treat your child, what to do in your home, etc. She's there to help.
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- **DID YOU KNOW...** that there's really no way to completely prevent your child from getting head lice? Teaching them not to share hats, combs and brushes, hair scrunchies, etc. is helpful, but they still can get them. **BUT YOU CAN...** check their hair often, once every week or two, so that you can treat them early if they do get them.
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- **DID YOU KNOW...** that it's really important to send your child to school with appropriate clothing for the weather? That may mean hats, coats, earmuffs, rain gear, etc. This will keep them from being tempted to share or borrow with others.
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- **DID YOU KNOW...** that the schools do a lot to prevent the spread of head lice? **FOR EXAMPLE...** kids' outdoor clothes are kept in lockers or "cubbies", so that their belongings are not in contact with other kids' stuff; phys. ed. equipment is cleaned regularly with safe cleaning products that kill lice and nits; we avoid using products that promote the spread of head lice, like foam-covered headphones.
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- **DID YOU KNOW...** that healthcare authorities all over the country recommend not sending kids home because of lice, even when they have live lice? **FOR EXAMPLE...** the American Association of Pediatricians, the CDC, the National Association of School Nurses, the American School Health Association.
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- **DID YOU KNOW...** that back in the days when we sent kids home with nits (eggs) in their hair, we had a few kids who failed grades because they missed so much school, because of their poor attendance? What a terrible reason to be held back for a whole year... In part, **THAT'S WHY...** we don't send kids home because of head lice.