

Head Lice Home Treatment

Iowa State University

Thielen Student Health Center



Adult head lice are roughly 2–3 mm long. Head lice infest the head and neck and attach their eggs to the base of the hair shaft. Lice move by crawling; **they cannot hop or fly**. Head lice infestation, or pediculosis, is spread most commonly by close person-to-person contact.

HOME CARES

Search for lice when hair is wet and comb through small sections at a time with a fine comb, louse comb or flea comb. Repeat every 2-3 days for 2 weeks.

Hats, scarves, pillow cases, bedding, clothing and towels worn or used by the infested person in the 2-day period just before treatment is started can be machine washed and dried using the hot water and hot air cycles because lice and eggs are killed by exposure for 5 minutes to temperatures greater than 53.5°C (128.3°F). Items that cannot be laundered may be dry-cleaned or sealed in a plastic bag for two weeks. Items such as hats, grooming aids and towels that come in contact with the hair of an infested person should not be shared. Vacuuming furniture and floors can remove an infested person's hairs that might have viable nits attached.

All infested persons (household members and close contacts) and their bedmates should be treated at the same time.

TREAT THE INFESTED PERSON(S)

- Requires using an over-the-counter (OTC) or prescription medication.
- Before applying treatment, it may be helpful to remove clothing that can become wet or stained during treatment.
- Apply lice medicine, also called pediculicide, according to the instructions contained in the box or printed on the label. If the infested person has very long hair (longer than shoulder length), it may be necessary to use a second bottle.
- **WARNING: Do not use a combination shampoo/conditioner, or conditioner before using lice medicine. Do not re-wash the hair for 1–2 days after the lice medicine is removed.**
- Have the infested person put on clean clothing after treatment.
- The medicine may take longer to kill all the lice. Comb dead and any remaining live lice out of the hair using a fine-toothed nit comb.
- If, after 8–12 hours of treatment, no dead lice are found and lice seem as active as before, the medicine may not be working. Do not retreat until speaking with your health care provider; a different pediculicide may be necessary.
- Nit (head lice egg) combs, often found in lice medicine packages, should be used to comb nits and lice from the hair shaft.
- After each treatment, checking the hair and combing with a nit comb to remove nits and lice every 2–3 days may decrease the chance of self-re-infestation. Continue to check for 2–3 weeks to be sure all lice and nits are gone. Nit removal is not needed when treating with spinosad topical suspension.
- Re-treatment is meant to kill any surviving hatched lice before they produce new eggs. For some drugs, re-treatment is recommended routinely about a week after the first treatment (7–9 days, depending on the drug) and for others only if crawling lice are seen during this period. Re-treatment with lindane shampoo is not recommended.

If you have any questions or concerns consult your provider or contact the Thielen Student Health Center at (515) 294-5801.