

# Head Lice

## What are head lice?

Head lice, *Pediculus humanus capitis*, are parasitic insects found on the head, eyebrows and eyelashes of people. Head lice are found worldwide. According to the CDC, an estimated 6 million to 12 million infestations occur each year in the United States among children 3 to 11 years of age.

## Who is at risk for getting head lice?

In the United States, head lice are most common among pre-school children attending child care, elementary school and the household members of infested children. Infestation is less common among African-Americans than among persons of other races.

## What are the signs and symptom of head lice infestation?

- Tickling feeling of something moving in the hair
- Itching caused by an allergic reaction to the bites
- Irritability and difficulty sleeping; head lice are most active in the dark
- Sores on head caused by scratching

## Where are head lice more commonly found?

They are most commonly found on the scalp, behind the ears near the neckline at the back of the neck. Head lice are rarely found on the body, eyelashes or eyebrows.

## How did my child get head lice?

Head lice move by crawling; they cannot hop or fly. Anyone who comes in close contact, especially head-to-head contact, is at great risk. Spread by contact with clothing or other personal items used by an infested person is uncommon. Personal hygiene or cleanliness in the home or school has nothing to do with getting head lice.

## How is head lice infestation diagnosed?

An infestation is diagnosed by looking closely through the hair and scalp for a live nymph or adult louse on the scalp or hair of a person. Finding a nymph or adult may be difficult because there are usually few of them and they can move quickly from searching fingers. Use of a magnifying lens and a fine-toothed comb may be helpful to find live lice. If crawling lice are not seen, finding nits within  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch of the scalp confirms that a person is infested and should be treated. If you only find nits more than  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch from the scalp and don't see a nymph or adult louse, the infestation is probably an old one and does not need to be treated

*If you are not sure if a person has head lice, see your health care provider or school nurse.*

*For more information, visit [www.tulsa-health.org](http://www.tulsa-health.org) or call 918.582.WELL*

