



Head Lice: treatment tips for parents using drug store products

Head lice are small insects that lay eggs on your head. The eggs are called nits. It's common among children and is not a sign of being dirty. Lice spread through head-to-head contact, or more rarely through shared hats, combs, helmets, towels etc. Lice are spread most commonly between family members, overnight guests and playmates that spend a lot of time together.

It's easy to mistake other hair debris (like dry skin flakes, dandruff, dirt or hair products) for lice and nits. **Only treat if live lice are found on the head.**

1. **Comb hair with a regular comb to remove tangles. Clean comb before next use** (wash comb, use an old toothbrush to get between the teeth of the comb, soak it for 10 minutes in water heated to at least 55 degrees Celsius or soak for 1 hour in rubbing alcohol or freeze it for 24 hours).
2. **Apply a Topical Head Lice Treatment product as follows:** If you have used hair conditioner or a 2 in 1 shampoo this must be washed off before starting treatment as **conditioner can interfere** with the treatment.
 - Shake the bottle.
 - Have the child cover their shoulders with an old towel or old shirt and protect their eyes by having them hold a washcloth against them.
 - Apply the treatment to dry hair, even if the product directions say, "towel dried hair." This will make sure the product is not watered down.
 - Put the lice treatment all over the scalp and rub in well (wear gloves).
 - Be sure that the treatment covers all of the hair, from the scalp to the ends.
 - Leave the treatment on the hair for as long as the package recommends.
3. **Rinse out the treatment over the sink.** Don't rinse in a bathtub where the product could get onto other parts of the body. Dry the hair with a clean towel. Have child put on clean clothes.
4. **Comb through the hair again with a regular comb to remove tangles. Clean comb.**
5. Bright light and magnification is helpful with this next step. **Comb hair with a metal lice comb.** Divide hair into small, thin sections, using clips or bobby pins. Firmly draw the comb from the scalp to the end of the hair. After each stroke, wipe off the comb on a tissue (be sure to throw used tissues away in a sealed bag) or rinse the comb in a bowl of warm water, and wipe dry. Continue section by section until the entire head is done. You may need to remove the nits with your fingernails, as they will not come off easily. **Clean comb before next use.**

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If you find a few live lice 8-12 hours after the treatment but they are moving more slowly than before, the treatment is working. If after 24 hours of treatment, no dead lice are found and the lice seem as active as before, the medicine may not be working. Do not retreat right away with the same product. Wash off the product and retreat as soon as possible using a product with a different active ingredient (speak with your pharmacist) or try the wet combing approach instead.

6. **Continue daily lice combing every day between the first and second treatment.** Do not skip this step! Do not use conditioners as this can reduce the effectiveness of the treatment. For best results, wet the hair with water when you do the daily combing. Remove any live lice you find and any nits that are close to the scalp (within 6 mm or ¼ inch). Be sure to clean the combs between use and before using on another head.
7. **Use the lice treatment a second time, 7 to 10 days after the first treatment.** Use the same product, and follow the same steps you used for the first treatment. The first treatment kills the live lice and may kill some of the nits, and the second treatment kills any lice that have hatched since the first treatment was done. No product currently available will kill all of the nits.
8. **Continue checking household members at least once a week for three weeks** after the second treatment is done to make sure everyone is free of live lice.
9. **If you find live lice after the second treatment has been done,** then repeat steps 1 to 8 using a different product (with a different active ingredient) to kill the lice. **Or try the wet combing method as an alternative.** If you continue to find live head lice after following these steps, contact Public Health Services or speak with your pharmacist.

