



How to check for head lice

What you need:

- Bright light
- Regular comb
- Metal lice comb
- White hair conditioner (this colour helps to make the lice easier to see)
- A magnifying glass can be helpful
- Paper tissues (white is best as it gives a good background to see what is removed from the hair)
- Plastic bag for garbage

What to look for:

- You are looking for both live lice and lice eggs, also known as nits: Adult lice are 2-4 mm long, about the size of a sesame seed. Lice move quickly and can be difficult to see. Lice tend to be reddish –brown in colour after feeding, but can also match their colour to the hair they are in.
- Lice eggs (nits) are shaped like tiny tear drops about the size of a poppy seed. They are glued firmly to the hair and will not move unless you pull them off with your fingernails or a nit comb.



Live lice on a nit comb next to hair strand, highly magnified.



What to do when checking for head lice:

- Apply a generous amount of conditioner to dry hair, soaking the scalp to the ends of the hair. Conditioner stuns the lice for about 20 minutes, and this makes it easier to find them.
- Remove tangles in hair with a regular comb.
- Start behind the ears and comb the hair section by section. Separating the hair with clips or bobby pins is helpful.
- Place the lice comb against the scalp and pull through to the end of the hair.
- With every stroke, check the comb for lice and wipe it off on a tissue. Looking at what is on the tissue helps to identify if you are finding lice or just regular hair debris (such as dandruff, skin flakes, dirt).
- Place used tissue in a plastic bag (when finished tie off bag and toss in outdoor garbage).
- Repeat the process several times moving around the whole head. Work section by section, so that the whole head of hair is combed through. It will take at least 15 minutes to do it properly.
- Be sure to clean the combs thoroughly and disinfect them before using them on another head (for example, soak for 1 hour in rubbing alcohol or for 10 minutes in water heated to 55 degrees Celsius).

If you find head lice:

- If you find live lice, you have a **confirmed** case that should be treated
- If you only find nits (lice eggs) and they are close to the scalp (less than ¼ inch or 6 mm) you have a **probable** case of lice. If your child has not been treated in the last month you should treat for head lice now. (Nits found further away from the scalp are probably dead and do not require treatment).
- **Nits and normal debris in the hair are hard to tell apart!** One way to test if what you are seeing are truly nits is to try and move them. Lice nits are cemented to the hair and will not move without being pulled off by fingers or a nit comb. If what you are finding moves easily, or flicks off easily, it is not a nit, and does not need to be treated



- If head lice are detected and a drug store treatment is going to be used, make sure that **all conditioner is washed from the hair before starting the treatment.**
- Check everyone else in the household for lice, even if they do not feel itchy.
- Treat everyone in the household who has a confirmed case on the same day. You have choices in how you treat head lice; you can buy treatments at the drug store or choose to wet-comb the hair. There is more information on treatment available here: <https://www.interiorhealth.ca/YourHealth/SchoolHealth/HeadLice/Pages/default.aspx>



Magnified louse and nits cemented to hair.