

# Head Lice 101

## What You Should Know About Head Lice

### Overview

Head lice are a common community problem. An estimated 6 to 12 million infestations occur each year in the United States, most commonly among children ages 3 to 11 years old. Children attending preschool or elementary school, and those who live with them, are the most commonly affected.<sup>1</sup>

Head lice are not dangerous.<sup>1</sup> They do not transmit disease, but they do spread easily, making it a community issue.<sup>1</sup> Additionally, despite what you might have heard, head lice often infest people with good hygiene and grooming habits.<sup>2,3</sup> Your family, friends or community may experience head lice. It's important to know some basics, including how to recognize symptoms and what to do if faced with an infestation.

### What Are Head Lice?

Head lice are tiny, wingless insects that live close to the human scalp. They feed on human blood.<sup>1</sup> An adult louse is the size of a sesame seed. Baby lice, or nymphs, are even smaller. Nits are the tiny, teardrop-shaped lice eggs. They attach to the hair shaft, often found around the nape of the neck or the ears. Nits can look similar to dandruff, but cannot be easily removed or brushed off.<sup>1</sup>



NIT



Nymph



Full-Grown Louse

### Fast Facts

- An estimated 6 to 12 million infestations occur each year among U.S. children 3 to 11 years of age<sup>1</sup>
- Head lice often infest people with good hygiene<sup>2,3</sup>
- Head lice move by crawling; they cannot jump or fly<sup>1</sup>
- Head lice do not transmit disease, but they do spread easily<sup>1</sup>
- If you or your child exhibits signs of an infestation, it is important to talk to your doctor to learn about treatment options

### How Are Head Lice Spread?

- Head lice move by crawling and cannot jump or fly.<sup>1</sup>
- Head lice are mostly spread by direct head-to-head contact – for example, during play at home or school, slumber parties, sports activities or camp.<sup>1</sup>
- It is possible, but not common, to spread head lice by contact with items that have been in contact with a person with head lice, such as clothing, hats, scarves or coats, or other personal items, such as combs, brushes or towels.<sup>1</sup>
- Head lice transmission can occur at home, school or in the community.<sup>1</sup>

### What Are the Signs & Symptoms of Infestation?

Signs and symptoms of infestation include<sup>1</sup>:

- Tickling feeling on the scalp or in the hair
- Itching (caused by the bites of the louse)
- Irritability and difficulty sleeping (lice are more active in the dark)
- Sores on the head (caused by scratching, which can sometimes become infected)

Finding a live nymph or adult louse on the scalp or in the hair is an indication of an active infestation. They are most commonly found behind the ears and near the neckline at the back of the head.<sup>4</sup>