

# The Facts of Head Lice

## Head Lice

Head lice are small parasitic insects that live mainly on the scalp and neck of their human host. Only humans get head lice and their presence does not indicate a lack of hygiene or sanitation. If taken away from the human scalp, head lice die within hours. This is because they must feed on human blood every six hours to survive.

## What do head lice look like?

There are three stages in the life cycle of lice - the nit, the nymph and the adult.

### Nits

Nits are eggs that are hardly visible, are often confused with dandruff, and are firmly attached to the base of the hair shaft. They appear oval and are usually grey or brown in colour. They take approximately seven days to hatch.



*Above: A nit on a hair shaft*

### Nymph

Nymphs are baby lice, and look like adult lice but smaller in size. They mature into adults five to 10 after hatching and feed on blood to survive.

### Adult

An adult louse is about the size of a sesame seed. A louse has six legs and is light to brown in colour. Females, which are larger than males, lay nits. An adult louse lives up to 30 days on a person's head.



*Below: An adult louse*

## What are the signs and symptoms?

You can tell whether your child has head lice by looking closely through the hair and scalp for nits, nymphs and adult lice. The presence of adult lice and evidence of nits confirms infestation. The nits are tiny white specks often stuck near the root of a hair. You may also notice fine black powder on pillows. This is lice faeces. Other signs and symptoms that may occur are frequent head scratching, tickling, and itching caused by allergic reaction to bites which can become infected.

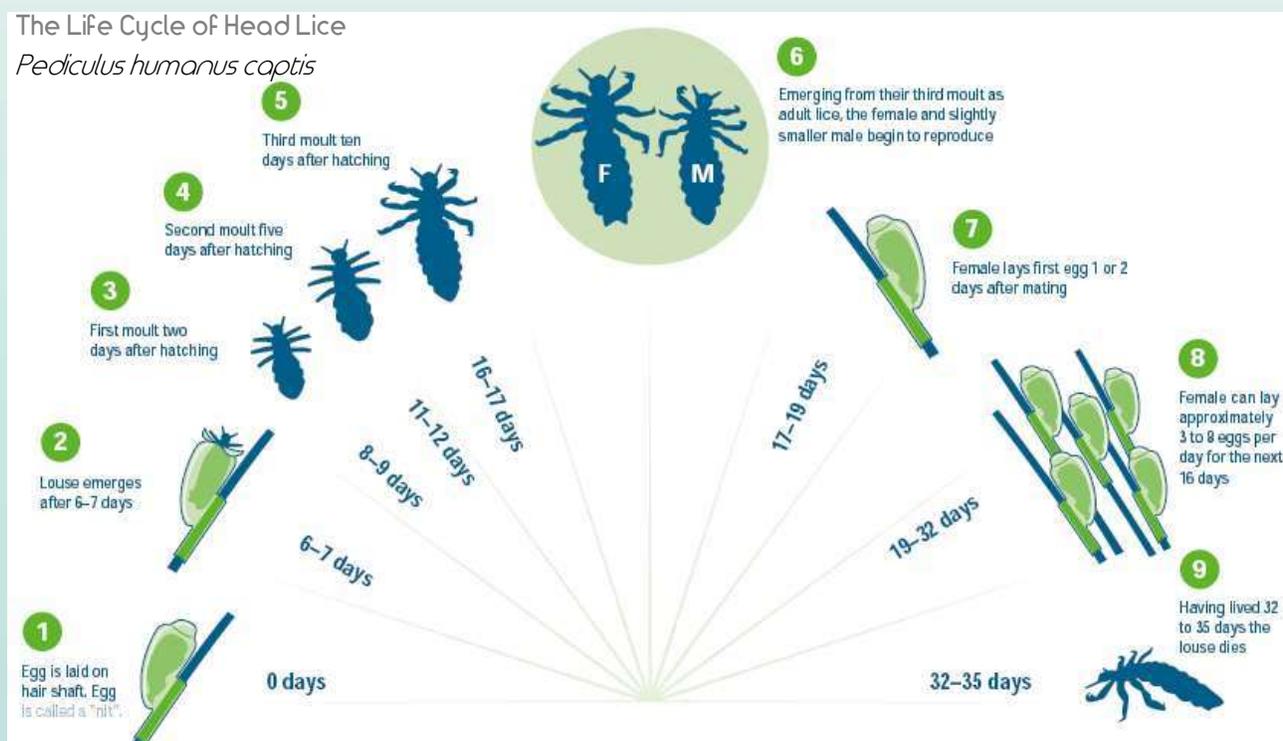
## How are head lice spread?

Head lice are usually transmitted by close head-to-head contact with an infested person. Apart from hair, lice have been found on combs, hairbrushes, pillowcases and hats. Head lice can live on furniture or carpet for up to 48 hours. Children are more susceptible because they are more likely to have close contact in homes, playgrounds, schools and around other children. Adults may become infested without

being aware of it and can become a source of infestation for others. Re-infestation of family members commonly occurs mainly because of close head-to-head contact.

## How to minimise the risk of infestation?

- Tying back long hair can help prevent the spread of head lice.
- If a family member is infested, examine all members of the family for head lice. Treat them only if necessary.
- Notify friends and the school if your child has head lice. The Public Health Regulations 2000 require that children be excluded from school until effective treatment against head lice has begun.
- Check children's hair regularly – anyone can catch head lice where people live, play or work together. Using Kiddy Cuts' recommended products and comb once a week will help in early head lice detection. Avoid head-to-head contact with other children or sharing hats.



## How to reduce the risk of re-infestation?

- In addition to the measures outlined above, place all brushes, combs, and hair accessories in very hot water (i.e. near-boiling, not standard hot water from taps) for at least 30 seconds.
- All bedding should be washed in a hot water cycle of 60 degrees, and dried in a hot clothes dryer for 15 minutes.

For more information about head lice, contact Kiddy Cuts, Rose Bay on (02) 8385 6454

Acknowledgement of information:

1. ACT Government Health Site: [www.health.act.gov.au/sites/default/files/Fact sheets/Head Lice](http://www.health.act.gov.au/sites/default/files/Fact%20sheets/Head%20Lice)
2. NSW Health, Head Lice Information, 2012. <http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/environment/headlice/Pages/default.aspx>.
3. 2. Department of Health, Victoria, Head Lice Information, 2014, <http://health.vic.gov.au/headlice/>.