

How to Detect Head Lice

Head lice will only survive two to four days away from the scalp at normal room temperature. Nits (lice eggs) will not hatch if away from the scalp as they need the scalp's temperature to hatch.

To determine if there is a case of head lice a live louse needs to be found on the head.

To detect lice you will need the following:

- plastic or metal lice comb
- regular comb
- towel
- tissue or paper towel
- plastic bag
- white colored hair conditioner
- old toothbrush
- rubbing alcohol
- hot water
- magnifying glass
- well lit room
- hair clips

Procedure:

1. Check for lice in a well lit room.
2. Wash the hair well and towel dry.
3. Place a dry towel on the shoulders.
4. Cover hair in white conditioner.
5. Comb the hair with a regular comb.
6. Use a nit comb to comb from the top of the head to the ends of the hair with the teeth of the comb touching the scalp. Search the entire head, the most common areas where nits are found are around the ears and the nape of the neck.
7. After each stroke check the teeth of the comb carefully for lice or nits then wipe comb with a tissue and discard in garbage bag. Use a magnifying glass as nits are tiny.
8. Use hair clips to pin up hair once an area has been combed five times.
9. A complete combing of a head will take 15 to 20 minutes.
10. If live lice are found then treatment will be required. Wash the hair to remove the conditioner before beginning the treatment.
11. Tie up garbage bag and discard.
12. Clean teeth of combs with old toothbrush then wash combs and hair clips in soapy hot water, then soak in rubbing alcohol, Lysol or hot water for 10 minutes.

Adult lice are the size of a sesame seed and are capable of changing their colour to match their surroundings. Newly hatched lice called nymphs are about the size of a pin head and may be clear coloured or red depending when they last ate. The nits (lice eggs) are very small and silver-gray in colour and stick to the shaft of the hair close to the scalp.

Adapted from Nova Scotia Public Health Services and UK Health Protection Agency

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