

# Head Lice

A Parent's Guide



Department of Health & Human Services

[oakgov.com/health](http://oakgov.com/health)

# What Are Head Lice?

Head lice are tiny, wingless insects that live on the human head. They do not spread disease and are not a serious medical condition. Lice do not jump, fly or swim. They are, however, good at crawling. Mature lice, which are no bigger than a sesame seed, move quickly away from light, making them hard to find. Head lice cannot survive on your pets. However, they can survive on your head for 30 days, but usually do not survive longer than 24 hours off the human head.

Lice eggs or “nits” are usually found within a ¼ inch of the scalp on the hair shaft. They look like tiny, whitish ovals that are attached or “glued” to the hair shaft. They cannot easily be flicked away. Be sure not to confuse nits with hair debris, such as dandruff. Head lice can cause your head to itch. However, you can have head lice for up to three months before you notice any itchiness or you may not itch at all.

**“Head Lice do NOT spread disease and are not a serious medical condition.”**

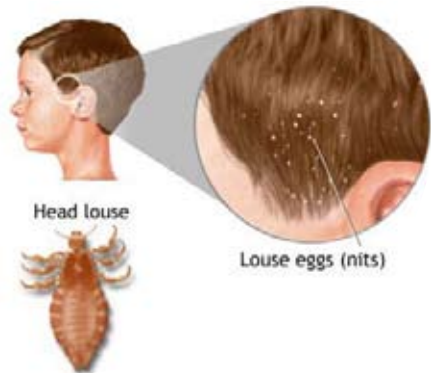
# What If I Find Head Lice?

Schools are to notify parents by letter if a case of lice occurs. If you receive a letter, check your child's head right away. Keep checking every 2 days until no head lice or nits are found for 10 days in a row.

If head lice or recently laid nits are found on your child's head, notify the school and keep the child home until properly treated. Remember, head lice have nothing to do with the cleanliness of a house or parenting skills.

Begin treatment as soon as possible. Check everyone in the household and treat anyone that has head lice and/or nits. Continue to check everyone for 3 weeks to avoid getting head lice again.

If you have trouble treating head lice, please contact the school, Oakland County Health Division or your child's physician.





# How Is Head Lice Treated?

## **Over-The-Counter Treatments:**

Treat head lice with shampoos specifically labeled for head lice. Read and follow the directions carefully. Use a clean towel to dry hair, not the towel used before the treatment. Many lice shampoos are insecticides and should be used with caution, especially on children and by pregnant or nursing women. If your child has allergies or asthma, please consult with his/her physician. If the package directions tell you to, apply a second treatment 10 days later, to kill lice that hatch after the first treatment. Do not over apply.

## **Alternative Treatments:**

Other products such as essential oils, food oils, salts, mayonnaise, etc., are not recommended. Do not apply any household insecticide, (such as Raid) or other chemicals not specifically labeled for treating head lice on humans. Well-intentioned parents treating children with toxic or flammable substances and hair dryers have caused injuries and death.

**The most important part  
of getting rid of lice is  
removing the eggs  
from the hair.**



### **Removal of Head Lice and Nits:**

Lice shampoos do not remove the eggs from the hair. The eggs must be combed out and/or removed by hand. This is the most important part of getting rid of lice.

Sit behind your child in a room with bright lighting to comb through the hair, one section at a time. Use a fine-toothed nit comb. These combs are sold at most stores or may be included in the treatment kit. Combs with metal teeth spaced close

together work best. Your child's hair should be clean, wet, well combed or brushed and tangle free before using a nit comb. A conditioner may be used to make combing easier.

Divide hair into small sections using hair clips. Comb through each section until no more lice or nits are seen. Clean the comb often with a paper towel to remove any lice or eggs and place directly into the trash. Continue to comb daily until no live lice are seen for 3 weeks.

### **Prescription Medications:**

In some cases, over-the-counter products do not get rid of head lice. Your child's physician may then order a prescription for treatment of head lice. Ask your physician or pharmacist if you don't fully understand the directions.

### **Clothes/ Household Cleaning:**

Wash items your child had contact with in the past two days such as towels, pillowcases, sheets, pajamas, clothes, coats, hats, and similar items in hot, soapy water (130°F) and dry on high heat for at least 30 minutes. Remember to clean all homes and cars that your child has been in the past two days. Vacuuming the house, mattress and furniture is recommended.

Wash combs, brushes, hats, and other hair accessories in hot, soapy water (130°F) to remove any lice or nits, and do not share with others.

Items that cannot be washed may be stored in a tightly sealed garbage bag for two weeks or may be placed in a freezer or outdoors (if temperatures are below freezing) for 24 hours. Lice in the environment (not on the head) usually die within a day and the eggs generally cannot live much longer.

# How Do I Avoid Head Lice?

## To avoid getting head lice:

- Do not share combs, brushes, bandanas, ribbons, barrettes, hair ties, hats, caps, scarves, headsets, towels or any other personal headgear.
- Do not try on other people's hats (even in department stores).
- Hang coats separately and place hats and scarves inside coat or jacket sleeves.
- Clean or disinfect shared headgear (such as helmets) with Lysol<sup>®</sup> or rubbing alcohol before it is used by others.
- Regularly check your child's head for lice.
- Avoid head-to-head contact at school (in gym, on the playground or during sports) and while playing at home with other children.
- Do not lie on bedding, pillows, carpets or upholstered furniture that have recently been used by someone with lice.





# Where Do I Go For More Information?

For additional information, visit these websites:

[www.oakgov.com/health](http://www.oakgov.com/health)  
*(Search Head Lice)*

[www.headlice.org](http://www.headlice.org)

[www.kidshealth.org](http://www.kidshealth.org)

[www.cdc.gov/lice](http://www.cdc.gov/lice)

[www.michigan.gov/mdch](http://www.michigan.gov/mdch)  
*(Search Head Lice)*

# OAKLAND COUNTY HEALTH DIVISION

## **PONTIAC**

1200 NORTH TELEGRAPH ROAD  
PONTIAC MICHIGAN 48341  
General Information 248-858-1280  
Toll Free 888-350-0900

## **SOUTHFIELD**

27725 GREENFIELD ROAD  
SOUTHFIELD MICHIGAN 48076  
General Information 248-424-7000  
Toll Free 800-758-9925

## **WALLED LAKE**

1010 E WEST MAPLE ROAD  
WALLED LAKE MICHIGAN 48390  
General Information 248-926-3300

L Brooks Patterson  
Oakland County Executive



COUNTY MICHIGAN  
HEALTH DIVISION

Department of Health & Human Services

[oakgov.com/health](http://oakgov.com/health)

*The Oakland County Health Division will not deny participation in its programs based on race, sex, religion, national origin, age or disability. State and Federal eligibility requirements apply for certain programs.*