

COMMONLY ASKED QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Q: The school called to say my child has head lice. What do I do now?

A: Read and ask questions about lice and how to get rid of them. First, check the head so you know what it is you are trying to eliminate. If you have questions, start with the person who contacted you. That person should be able to give you some guidance about school policy. Your health care provider or school nurse is a reliable source of information. Pharmacists know a lot about lice products, and are usually willing to spend time with their customers discussing the details of treatment and how to use products. Be sure to check every person in the household. Even though you treat for lice, it's no guarantee they are gone forever. They can be caught again and again.

Q: How did my child get head lice?

A: Head lice are passed from person to person, usually by close contact. Since we are more likely to have close contact with another person as a child, children are more likely to come in contact with someone who already has head lice. The person with head lice may be another child, or could be an adult (that may be unaware they have lice).

Q: My child was sent home from school because of head lice. What will the school require on re-entry?

A: Most schools will require the head to be lice and nit free. It is not unusual for a person at the school to inspect the child's head before the child is allowed to return to the classroom. If you have questions about re-entry, you are encouraged to speak with either the teacher, administrator or the person responsible for re-entry at your child's school.

Q: I did shampoo the head with lice shampoo and afterwards I still found live lice. Why?

A: Pediculicides are absorbed by the louse. When enough has been absorbed to paralyze or over-stimulate the nervous system the louse will die. In the meantime, the louse may survive, but be a bit slower than before treatment. The recommendation is to remove all live lice, check the head every two or three days, removing all live lice and nits, and retreat in seven to ten days. Retreating sooner than seven to ten days is not recommended. Retreating sooner than recommended will not get rid of the lice any faster or better.



Q: How do I get the nits out?

A: Nits can be removed by fingernails or by using fine-toothed combs. Special combs are available for purchase from manufacturers, are often included with products or can be purchased at pharmacies. Many stores that sell pet supplies sell a comb for flea removal. Although lice and fleas are not the same, they are about the same size and the comb used for removal of fleas from pets will also remove nits from human hair. Flea combs are less expensive than head lice combs.

Q: I can't afford expensive head lice treatments. Are home remedies a good idea?

A: Before you try any home remedies ask your health care professional, pharmacist or local health department for information and advice. Never use lice spray or pet shampoo, kerosene or any chemical products that have not been approved for use on a human to kill lice or nits. Lice sprays are insecticides meant for objects, not people. Your local health department or school nurse will be able to provide you with information.

Q: How do I know that the treatment I choose will not harm my child?

A: Ask your health care professional or pharmacist about all the risks and benefits of treatment, read the information provided with the product, search the internet (but be aware that all information may not be backed by reliable research).

Q: What is the school going to do to guarantee me that my child, upon returning to school, will not get head lice again?

A: Most schools have a program in place to notify parents of situations involving head lice in the school setting. Many times it is not possible to know where the lice came from. Lice do not survive off of the human head, so no amount of cleaning and insecticide bombing at school will eradicate lice from the head. Schools generally have regular cleaning procedures and schedules.

Q: Is Lindane® (Kwell) dangerous to use on my child? My doctor prescribed it.

A: Lindane® is deemed safe to use by the Federal Drug Administration (FDA), the agency of the federal government that test and determines if a product is safe to use. The FDA has determined Lindane® is not unsafe when used as prescribed. One of the problems that occurs with Lindane® (and other products also) is that it is not always used as the manufacturer directed. Many people seem to have the philosophy that if a little bit is good, then a lot is better, or if one treatment kills a louse and another is seen before seven days, then it must be okay to use the product again (before the seven day time span). It is effective in killing live lice, but can be harmful if used more often than directed. OTC pediculicides have been shown to act more quickly than Lindane to kill lice, so consider the risks and benefits of Lindane and other pediculicides or alternative treatments.

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