

Lice 101: Myths and Realities about Head Lice

Definitions	
Lice: More than one louse.	Nit: Eggs, dead or alive, of a louse
Louse: Small insect that lives on the scalp.	Parasite: Lives off another, in this case the blood of humans.
Pediculosis: Having an infestation of lice.	Infestation: Having an insect present, in this case, in your head.
Myths	Truths
Head lice are easy to get.	Lice are spread only mainly by head-to-head contact. They are much harder to get than a cold, flu, ear infection, pink eye, strep throat, food poisoning, or impetigo.
You can get lice from your dog, guinea pig, or other animal.	Lice are species-specific. You can only get human lice from another human. You cannot get another animal's lice.
You can get head lice from hats and helmets.	Rarely, but possible. Hairbrushes, pillows, and sheets are also uncommon modes of transmission.
School is a common place for lice transmission.	School is an unlikely source of transmission. Much more common are family members, overnight guests, and playmates who spend a large amount of time together.
Poor hygiene contributes to lice.	Hygiene makes absolutely no difference. You get lice by close personal head-to-head contact with someone else that has lice, not by being dirty.
Lice can jump or fly from one person to another.	Lice can only crawl. They can neither fly nor jump. They must crawl from one person to another.
Any nits left in the hair can cause lice to come back.	Any nits farther away than one quarter to one half inch on the hair shaft are ALREADY HATCHED and pose no risk to others.
Eggs or nits can fall out of the hair, hatch, and cause lice in another person.	Nits are cemented to the hair and very hard to remove. They cannot fall off. Newly hatched lice must find a head quickly or will die.
Lice can live a long time.	Lice live only 1 to 2 days off the head. Each louse only lives about 30 days on the head.
All members of a family should be treated if one person has lice.	Only the person with lice should be treated. Lice shampoos are INSECTICIDES and can be dangerous if used incorrectly or too frequently. Household members and close contacts should be checked, but only treat those who actually have lice. The house should NOT be sprayed with insecticide, nor used on clothing or other items.
Checking a classroom when one student has lice can prevent lice from spreading.	Classroom transmission is EXCEEDINGLY RARE and checking students is a waste of valuable teaching time. Checking family members and close playmates is much more appropriate.
Avoiding lice is important as they spread disease.	Head lice do not spread any known disease. They are annoying and irritating, but not dangerous.

Source: *Pediatric Nursing*, 40(5), 226-235. Retrieved March 15, 2015, from <https://www.pediatricnursing.net/ce/2016/article4005226235.pdf>