

DIY

PEST AND LAWN



Head louse

Photo: Lorenza Beati
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Body louse

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Crab louse

Photo: Matt Bertone
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Compiled by: Siavash Taravati, UC IPM program



Head lice are tiny, 6-legged insects about this long (-). They may be grayish white. If they are filled with blood, they will look red. They do not have wings, so they cannot fly. They do not jump but they can move very fast. This makes it hard to find them in the hair.

Nits are the eggs of the lice. They look like bits of dandruff in the hair but do not flake off when touched. They are stuck to the hair. They are about this size (').

Nits may be yellowish white to brown.

Head lice attach their nits to a hair shaft with waterproof "glue." The eggs are laid close to the scalp where the temperature is warm and constant. It is a perfect place for them to grow and hatch. Look for nits at the back of the neck and behind the ears.

Usually the first sign of head lice is intense itching. Lice do not pass along disease. However, if the skin is scratched open, sores can get infected.

How to Get Lice

Lice are usually spread from child to child when sharing clothing, hats, scarves, combs, brushes, hair trims or helmets that have strands of hair with nits. Lice can also be passed when playing contact sports.

People of all ages and races can get lice, but they are less common in African American children. It doesn't matter how clean you are or where you live. House pets do not carry human lice (and should not be treated).

Life Cycle of Lice

Lice spend their entire life on human heads. A louse can live up to a month if it can feed on blood several times a day. If lice fall off the scalp, they will die within a day or two.

The female louse can lay up to 8 nits per day. The eggs hatch in about a week (6 to 9 days). The baby "nymphs" need a blood meal within minutes of hatching. In another 7 days, they grow to be adults and can start laying eggs. Knowing the life cycle will help you to understand the treatment of lice.

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