

## Overview

Head lice (*Pediculus humanus capitis*) are a common community problem. An estimated 6 to 12 million lice infestations occur each year in the United States, most commonly among children ages 3 to 11 years old. Live lice feed on human blood and live close to the human scalp. They are not dangerous and do not transmit disease, but they do spread easily.<sup>1</sup>

## Signs & Symptoms of Infestation

Signs and symptoms of infestation include<sup>1</sup>:

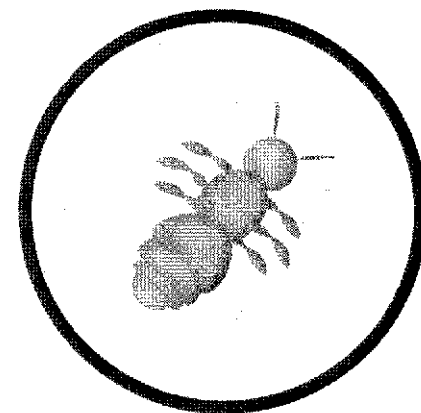
- Tickling feeling on the scalp or in the hair
- Itching (caused by the bites of the louse)
- Irritability and difficulty sleeping (lice are more active in the dark)
- Sores on the head (caused by scratching, which can sometimes become infected)

When checking a student for head lice, you may see several forms: the egg, the nymph and the adult louse. The eggs, also called nits, are tiny, teardrop-shaped eggs that attach to the hair shaft. Nits often appear yellowish or white, and can look like dandruff but cannot be removed or brushed off. The nymph, or baby louse, is smaller and grows to adult size in one to two weeks. The adult louse is the size of a sesame seed and appears tan to grayish-white.<sup>1</sup>

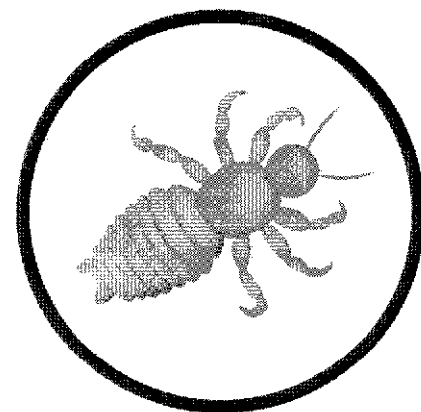
Finding a live nymph or adult louse on the scalp or in the hair – most commonly behind the ears and near the neckline at the back of the head – is an indication of an active infestation.<sup>2</sup>



NIT



Nymph



Full-Grown Louse

## Fast Facts

- An estimated 6 to 12 million infestations occur each year among U.S. children 3 to 11 years of age<sup>1</sup>
- Head lice are most common among children attending child care or elementary school, and the household members of infested children<sup>1</sup>
- Head lice move by crawling; they cannot jump or fly<sup>1</sup>
- Head lice do not transmit disease, but they do spread easily<sup>1</sup>

## Risk Factors & Transmission

Head lice often infest people with good hygiene and grooming habits.<sup>3,4</sup> Children attending preschool or elementary school, and those who live with them, are the most commonly affected.<sup>1</sup>

Head lice are wingless insects that cannot jump or fly. They move by crawling, and are most often spread by direct head-to-head contact. It is also possible, but uncommon, to spread head lice by contact with clothing (such as hats, scarves, coats) or other personal items (such as combs, brushes or towels).<sup>1</sup>