

# TALK ABOUT NITPICKING! BACK-TO-SCHOOL AND HEAD LICE

*This podcast is presented by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. CDC – safer, healthier people.*

Summer's over and kids will soon be off to school. No parent wants to get that phone call saying that their child has head lice. And no parent wants to discover that their child has brought lice home! Head lice are insects and parasites which can be found on a person's scalp, behind the ears, and near the neckline at the back of the neck. Sometimes head lice are even found on the eyebrows and eyelashes. Head lice are most common in preschool and elementary school children. The egg of a louse is often called a nit. These eggs are very small – about the size of a knot in thread – and they can be very hard to see. Sometimes they may be mistaken for dandruff or hair spray droplets.

Head lice do not transmit disease, but they are a nuisance. Parents often get upset, or even angry, when they learn their child has head lice, but having head lice is a fairly common problem and has nothing to do with hygiene or good parenting. In fact, good health and hygiene habits or a clean house or school have nothing to do with getting head lice.

So, who gets head lice? Basically, anyone who has head-to-head contact with someone who already has head lice is at the greatest risk. Children 3 to 11 years old get head lice most often. People that live in the same house as a person who has head lice also often get head lice. Although it is much less common, head lice can also spread through contact with objects and personal items, like hats, scarves, coats, or hair ribbons that were recently used by a person who has head lice. It is also uncommon to spread head lice by using someone else's combs or brushes because lice have difficulty hanging on to smooth surfaces. Even though it is rare, head lice can be spread by lying on a pillow or bed that was used recently by someone who already had lice. And don't blame your pets -- dogs and cats don't get or spread human lice.

If you or your child have head lice, it is important to treat right away. Several products are available over-the-counter or with a doctor's prescription. Our website can give you more information about treating people and the household.

If you discover that your child has head lice, let your child's day care or school staff know so others can be sure to check their children. CDC does not recommend treating people who do not already have head lice – only those that are confirmed to have them.

For more information, go to our web site at [www.cdc.gov/lice](http://www.cdc.gov/lice).

*For the most accurate health information, visit [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov) or call 1-800-CDC-INFO, 24/7.*