

Debunking Head Lice Myths

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| Head lice fly and jump. | FALSE. Head lice walk, run, or crawl from hair to hair. |
| It is easy to get lice. | FALSE. Head lice are much harder to get than a cold, the flu, ear infections, pink eye, strep throat, or impetigo (all air-borne infections), because lice is spread by head-to-head contact. |
| Lice are dirty and spread disease. | FALSE. Head lice do not spread any known disease, nor are they impacted by dirt or lack of. |
| You need to vacuum and wash everything, and put what you can in the dryer. | FALSE. Just wash the items your child has used and vacuum the fabric areas (such as the carpet in the bedroom, a fabric couch or car seat, etc.) on which your child has laid his/her head during the last 24 hours. |
| Head lice breed on dirty hair or if you have a dirty home. | FALSE. Lice can breed on clean or dirty hair, in a clean or dirty home. |
| My mother treated my head lice with gasoline, so I can treat my child's head lice the same way. | FALSE. In the past, people used to treat lice with kerosene. Now, we know there are much better and safer methods available. However, some people remember their parents or grandparents treating head lice with gasoline, so they do what their parents did without realizing the harmful risks. |
| All schools require students with lice to be sent home. | FALSE. Some schools do, some schools don't. |
| Only children get head lice. | FALSE. Adults and babies can get head lice, too. |
| You can get lice from your cat or dog. | FALSE. Head lice only live on humans |
| Head lice can survive many days off of people on furniture, linens, or clothing. | FALSE. Head lice need a blood meal every 3-4 hours and the warmth of the human scalp to survive. When off the human body, they cannot survive for more than 24 hours. |
| Nits (lice eggs) can fall off a person's head, hatch, and cause another person to get lice. | FALSE. Nits are glued to the hair shaft by a cement-like substance and are very hard to remove. When a nymph (baby louse) is hatched, it must feed within two hours. |
| You can get head lice from sitting in a desk next to someone who has lice. | FALSE. Unless you are sitting head-to-head next to someone, since head lice do not fly or jump, just sitting next to a person with head lice will not necessarily cause you to get it. |
| Lice are not commonly spread through school or camp. | FALSE. It is more common to get head lice from people in these locations, such as playmates, roommates, or anyone with whom you may have close contact. |
| Lice are commonly spread through hats or helmets. | FALSE. Spread of lice through hats or helmets is rare: less than a 2% chance. |
| You can always use mayonnaise, oil, vinegar, or conditioner to get rid of lice. | FALSE. While these home remedies might work for some people, they do not work for all. In addition, these treatments would have to be repeated every 2-3 days for 3 weeks and have to be done along with combing. These methods also may be messy, smelly, and uncomfortable. Mayonnaise may cause salmonella. |

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| Head lice prefer long hair. | FALSE. Head lice just like hair, although it is more likely that people with long hair may get lice. |
| Natural alternative products, or over-the-counter lice removal products are always safe and 100% effective. | FALSE. Many products are not approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, and others may contain ingredients that are not recommended for use on young children. No product is 100% effective. |
| Chlorine or hair dye kills lice. | FALSE. Head lice are immune to almost every chemical, including chlorine. They are extremely hearty insects with a tough exoskeleton and they are impervious to chemicals. Also, no chemicals penetrate the shell of the nits. |
| You can get head lice by swimming in a pool with a person who has lice. | FALSE. Lice do not swim. However, if someone is in direct contact with another individual, even if the hair is wet in a pool, the bugs can crawl from one head to another. |
| You have to put every pillow, bedding, clothing, towels, and stuffed animals in your house in plastic bags for 2 weeks to smother lice. | FALSE. Just wash or vacuum the items the person who has lice used within the last 24 hours. You can also put these items in the dryer for 30 minutes. |
| In time, inbreeding of lice on a person's head causes them to die spontaneously, which is why kids do not become covered with them. It is a self-limiting condition. | FALSE. Lice can last until treated properly. |
| Super-Lice exist. | FALSE. There is no such thing as a "super louse." This is just a catch-all phrase that means lice are becoming more resistant to certain treatments. |