



LICE INFORMATION

The head louse is an insect that lives and breeds on the human head. It is found worldwide and as many as 6 to 12 million people get head lice per year. Head lice do not live on pets or on other parts of the body and they cannot survive for more than 24-48 hours off of a human head (they need to feed on blood). Did you know that lice has been found on the hair of ancient Egyptian mummies and lice combs found in their tombs look almost identical to the combs used today? While lice are commonly found in schools and daycares, they should not be ignored. Lice aren't known to carry disease, but they spread easily, can cause discomfort and can be expensive and time consuming to deal with. Anyone and everyone can get lice so it's up to all of us to work together to prevent outbreaks and curb the spread once lice is found in the school.

Having lice is embarrassing! It's associated with poor hygiene. If my kids get lice, I'm not going to tell anyone.

Lice love everyone, but they actually prefer clean hair! They can't fly or jump, but they're great at crawling and clean hair lets them move more freely. It's really important to report all cases of lice to the school. Why? That way other parents can be notified and can be more diligent about doing regular lice checks on their children, catching and treating lice early on before it spreads. Both adults and children can get lice. Remember that lice is an insect not a virus, so if you give it to a friend, they can give it back to you!

Lice is most commonly spread by head-to-head contact - lice climb from one person's hair to another person's hair. They can also be transmitted by putting items on your head that were recently on the head of someone with lice or by placing your head on areas where a person with lice has recently placed their head (e.g. couch cushion or head rest).

I'm sure if I just ignore them, the lice will go away. If I pretend they're not there, they'll magically disappear, right?

Ummm...no. Once she has mated, a single adult female louse can lay 3 to 5 eggs per day and live for 30 days (that's 90-150 eggs from one louse). Within 7 to 10 days, the eggs hatch and the immature lice (nymphs) begin to feed on blood by biting the human head. Within another 7 to 10 days, the nymphs become adults which are mature enough to mate and lay their own eggs and ***the cycle repeats itself***. While the original louse may die after 30 days, her children and grandchildren and great-grandchildren will just continue on. Eggs are stuck to the hair and cannot move from person to person, but lice can.



While some of the lice will stay on the original head to keep feeding and laying eggs, many of the others will move to other heads. They may move to a new head when kids play together at school; when they lean in to read together; when one child cuddles up in a blanket and then a sibling does the same thing right after; or when a parent leans over to give a kiss goodnight. So you see, if lice are ignored, they just multiply and spread.

Okay, so how can we prevent ourselves from getting lice?

- If hair is long enough, tie it back! Braids, a bun, a ponytail - choose a style!
- Prevent head-to-head contact and don't share items that come in contact with heads (e.g. brushes/combs, hats, scarves, earmuffs, blankets, stuffies, pillows, clothing).
- Do weekly lice checks as part of your family's bath routine. Important Note: if you can see lice on a head just by looking, the lice have already been there for about 3 to 4 weeks. Our aim is to catch them earlier than that (before most of the first eggs hatch). That cannot be done simply by looking as lice eggs are small, light brown and attached to one side of the hair. A proper lice check involves combing through the hair with a good quality comb and wiping every few strokes on to a paper towel so that lice and eggs are easy to spot against the white background. Step by step instructions can be found in the [Doing A Proper Lice Check and Comb Through Section](#).
- If your child gets lice, notify the school so that other families can be notified and know to take the precautions listed above.

When doing my weekly lice check I saw something, but I'm not sure what it was.

Below are some [photos](#) which may help you with identification. There are also lice removal companies in the area (Lice Squad, The Lice Crew, Nitwits) that educate people, perform lice checks and provide treatments. You can make appointments to have your heads checked and some of these agencies will also diagnose your findings for free if you [submit a photo online](#). Lice Squad often offers free Wednesday night walk-in lice check clinics and will teach you how to do a proper check at home while you're there (call for info). Lice Squad also offers free checks for teachers all year round. Simply call for an appointment and bring your teacher ID.

We have lice. Now what do we do?

Typically, lice treatments work by paralyzing or suffocating lice so that they can then be manually removed. **With any treatment option, all lice, eggs and nits present in the hair must be manually removed with a comb in order for the treatment to be successful. Sometimes it takes more than one treatment.** Lice and their eggs cannot simply be washed out of hair.



If one member of your household has lice, be sure to check everyone else in your home as well. All family members with lice should be treated at the same time so that the lice does not continue spreading within and outside of your household.

1. Visit a lice removal company (Lice Squad, The Lice Crew, Nitwits etc) to have a natural treatment done professionally. This can be costly, but is usually faster and easier than doing it yourself. Treatments can be done at the clinic or at your house and the staff will teach you a lot while they work.
2. Natural treatment shampoos and good quality combs for use at home can be purchased from the companies themselves or from stores such as the Big Carrot. Use them according to the directions, which includes doing a full comb through of the head in all 4 directions until lice, nits and eggs are no longer present. This treatment usually needs to be repeated every 4 or 5 days for about 2 weeks.
3. Home remedies such as olive oil or coconut oil can be effective but may be very time consuming and messy. They work by suffocating lice so that they can be more easily combed out. Saturate the hair with the oil of choice (these two are recommended as they are easy to wash out) and then cover the hair with a shower cap and leave it on for 4-6 hours (never leave on a child over night or while the child is unattended). Take off the cap, rinse the hair and wash it with shampoo and conditioner. Next do a thorough comb through of the entire head until no lice or eggs remain. This treatment usually needs to be repeated every 4 or 5 days for about 2 weeks.
4. There are chemical shampoos available at the pharmacy but they are generally not recommended by experts as they can be harmful to humans and have produced lice which are resistant to certain chemicals. If using, follow the directions carefully and remember that the treatment must be followed by a thorough comb through of the entire head until no lice or eggs remain.

How do I clean my home?

The good news is that lice will die within 24-48 hours without a blood meal, meaning that they cannot live longer than that when off of a human head. Cleaning should be done after your first big treatment and can be repeated every 4 or 5 days after follow-up treatments.

Concentrate on the items that could have come into contact with the person who has lice within the last 24-48 hours (e.g. sheets, towels, brushes, stuffies, clothing and outerwear, couch cushions, car seats, head rests etc):

1. Anything that can safely be put in the clothing dryer should be placed in the dryer on high heat for 20-30 minutes. Note: If you are washing sheets and cannot dry them on high heat, put them aside for 2 days before putting them back on the bed (see number 3 below).



2. Vacuum items that cannot be dried (carpets and rugs, couches, car seats etc).
3. Any items that cannot be dried on high heat or vacuumed, should be set aside for 48 hours. Often people will put these items into plastic bags to ensure that they do not come into contact with other items during this time.
4. Remove all hair from brushes and combs and soak them hot soapy water for 10 minutes or place them in a sealed plastic bag in the freezer for 24 hours.

Is there anything else you can tell me?

It may seem really embarrassing at first, but getting lice is nothing to be ashamed of. We're all in this together. If someone in your household gets lice, treat it and work to prevent it in the future. If your child (who attends Wilkinson) gets lice, call the school office and report it so that everyone else can take precautions and we can work together to keep it from spreading. If someone in your family has lice, tell anyone they have been in close contact with recently so they know to check their heads.

Typically, only 50% of people experience symptoms once they have lice and the symptoms don't usually appear for about 2 weeks (another reason why it's important to do regular lice checks). These symptoms can include:

- Itchiness of the scalp. The itchiness is a reaction to an allergen in the saliva of the louse, which is secreted as the louse feeds.
- A pink rash behind the ears and at the nape of the neck, resembling an allergic reaction.
- A tickling or crawly feeling in the hair.
- Sores from scratching or tiny red marks from where the lice have fed.
- The sight of live bugs.
- Difficulty sleeping as lice are nocturnal.

Remember that all lice and eggs need to be removed from a person's head in order for a case of lice to be considered properly treated. If any eggs remain, they can hatch and the lice infestation can begin all over again.

Doing A Proper Lice Check and Comb Through

Lice eggs are shaped like tear drops and are glued to the hair shaft on one side at an angle. Viable eggs are very small and are usually brownish/yellow or caramel in colour. Empty egg cases are called nits and are clear or opaque. Eggs are not white and can't be blown out of the hair like dandruff. Unless a person is well trained, it is very difficult to see lice eggs just by looking.



By combing them out of the hair and wiping them in to a white paper towel, the eggs become visible. This technique is used both to check for lice and eggs and also to remove them during treatment.

1. Begin by purchasing a good quality lice comb that is made of sturdy metal and has tines that will not damage hair. Good combs can be purchased from lice removal companies (Lice Squad, The Lice Crew, Nitwits etc), from stores such as the Big Carrot on Danforth or online.
2. The person doing the checking should tie back their own hair.
3. Wet and towel dry the hair of the person being checked and apply enough conditioner so that you can brush out all of the tangles and slide the comb through the hair easily.
4. Because eggs attach to one spot on the hair shaft, you will need to comb the entire head in all 4 directions: front to back, back to front, left to right and right to left.
5. Working with small sections at a time, comb through the hair from the roots all the way through the ends, bringing the comb right down past the ends of the hair. The comb works by sliding the eggs off of the hair so it's important to bring the comb completely through the hair as opposed to stopping just shy of the ends and pulling the comb out to the side. If you do that, the eggs may just end up near the ends of the hair.
6. Comb each section a few times. Every few strokes, wipe the comb off on to a piece of paper towel and check for any lice and eggs. The eggs often look like little brown ovals with a tiny tail and the lice are generally bigger and darker with visible legs. If you find something, it's time for treatment! If you're doing the combing as part of a treatment, continue combing each small section until no additional lice or eggs are found and then move to the next section.
7. Once finished, wash out the conditioner with regular shampoo and launder the clothes worn during the combing. Clean the brushes and combs used by first wiping off the comb completely and removing all hair. Soak the combs and brushes in hot soapy water for 10 minutes or place them in a sealed plastic bag in the freezer for 24 hours.

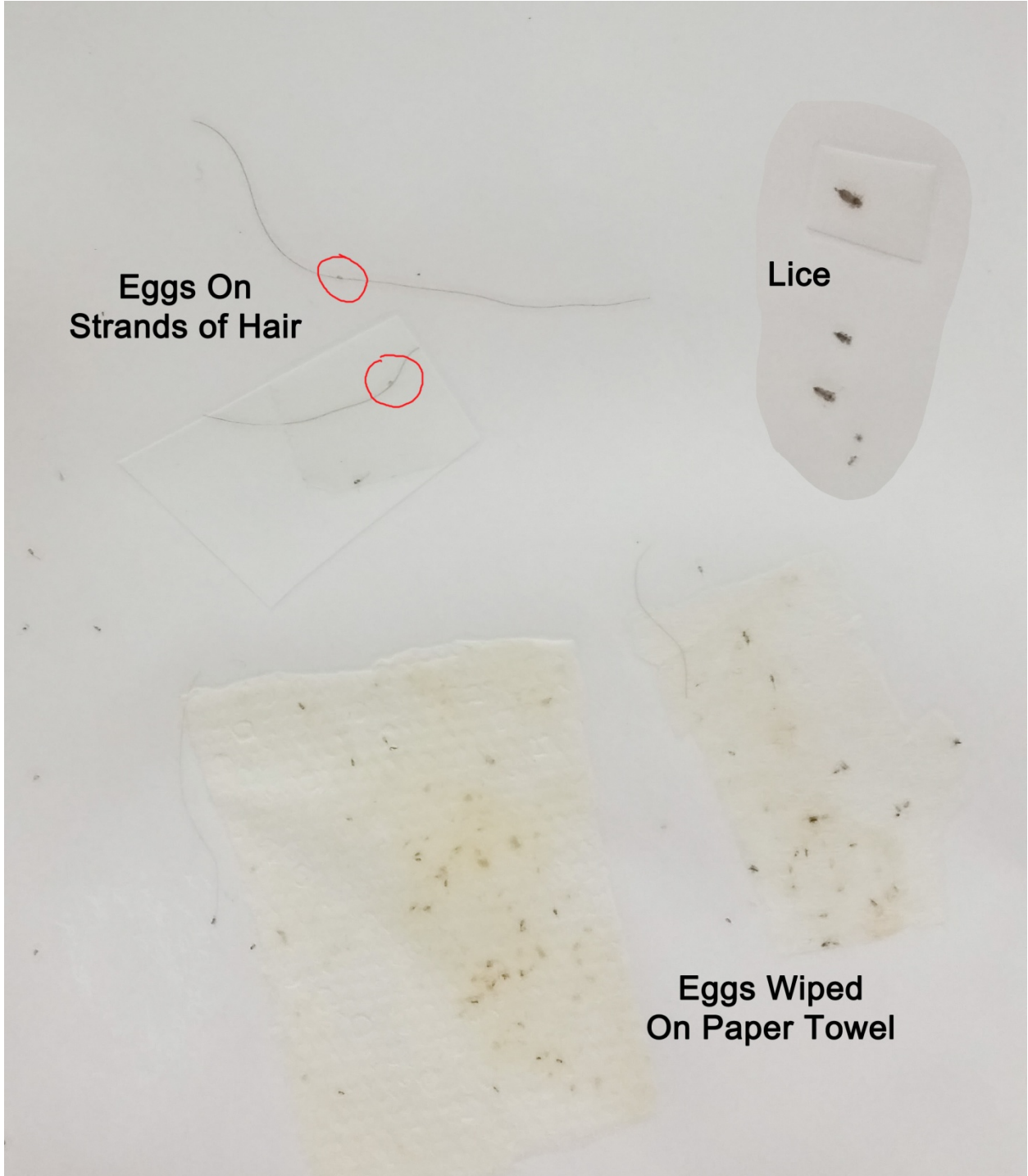
Identification photos are below.



**Eggs On
Strands of Hair**

Lice

**Eggs Wiped
On Paper Towel**





Lice Eggs On Paper Towel (Magnified)



Lice Comb



Lice

This document has been compiled using information provided by www.licesquad.com (416 466-0261, Central_toronto@licesquad.com) and Toronto Public Health.