

Lice – Tips for Camps

Every year, one of the most common calls to the American Camp Association Camp Crisis Hotline comes from camps who have questions about lice.



Resources updated for 2017.

So called "super lice" have been reported in 25 states. Researchers at the University of Illinois - Edwardsville have reported that lice populations in at least 25 states have developed resistance to over-the-counter treatments still widely recommended by doctors. The solution? Scientists say that these lice can still be controlled by using different chemicals, some of which are available only by prescription. [Read more from the University of Illinois - Edwardsville lice study.](#)

Every year, one of the most common calls to the American Camp Association Camp Crisis Hotline comes from camps who have questions about lice. Either they have detected head lice on a camper or staffer's head, or they are preparing for an infestation —should it occur — and want some advice. Camps are looking for resources, guidelines, and products to help them. ACA shares our lessons learned from years of helping camps:

Top Five Tips for Camps

1. **Be Informed.** Lice can show up in any camp. Ensure that the health care, nursing, and medical staff at your camp are familiar with lice identification and your camp's response protocols.
2. **Have a lice control policy.** Establish a head lice control policy prior to camp opening for the season. Consider how you might inform parents of your lice policy before camp begins. *Both the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommend treatment and prevention of further infestation, then allowing those afflicted to remain in group settings. Other organizations, such as the National Pediculous Association (NPA), recommend temporarily removing those afflicted from the group setting until all signs of nits and lice are gone. Determine your camp's philosophy before your camp season so you will be prepared should lice and/or nits be detected.*
3. **Screen for lice.** Teach and practice appropriate lice screening procedures. Ensure that camp staff understand their role in the screening process.
4. **Lice infestations need to be treated quickly.** Establish a treatment procedure, according to your decision in #2 above. If you will be treating those afflicted with lice at camp and treating them at camp, be sure to have products on hand in the health center. Know that some strains of lice are resistant to over-the-counter products and will require chemicals available only by prescription. (See the new [University of Illinois-Edwardsville lice study](#).) Understand that lice remediation often requires more than one treatment application.
5. **Communication is critical.** Establish a policy about who you will inform if an infestation occurs. Be prepared with key messages and facts (see below for a template letter you can edit and use.)

What are lice?

Lice are parasitic insects that can be found on people's heads and bodies, including the pubic area. Human lice survive by feeding on human blood. Lice found on each area of the body are different from each other. The three types of lice that live on humans are:

- *Pediculus humanus capitis* (head louse)
- *Pediculus humanus corporis* (body louse, clothes louse) **Only the body louse is known to spread disease.*
- *Pthirus pubis* ("crab" louse, pubic louse)

Lice infestations are spread most commonly by close person-to-person contact. Dogs, cats, and other pets *do not* play a role in the transmission of human lice. Lice move by crawling; they cannot hop or fly. Both over-the-counter and prescription medications are available for treatment of lice infestations.

Head Lice

Adult head lice are 2.1–3.3 mm in length. Head lice infest the head and neck and attach their eggs to the base of the hair shaft. The head louse (singular of lice) is a parasitic insect that can be found on the head, eyebrows, and eyelashes of people. Head lice feed on human blood several times a day and live close to the human scalp. *Head lice are not known to spread disease.*

- **Who is at risk for getting head lice?** Head lice are found worldwide. In the United States, infestation with head lice is most common among preschool children, elementary school children, and the household members of infested children. Although reliable data on how many people in the United States get head lice each year are not available, an estimated 6 million to 12 million infestations occur each year in the United States among children three- to eleven-years of age.
- **How is head lice spread?** Head lice move by crawling; they cannot hop or fly. Head lice are spread by direct contact with the hair of an infested person. Anyone who comes in head-to-head contact with someone who already has head lice is at greatest risk. Spreading caused by contact with clothing (such as hats, scarves, coats) or other personal items (such as combs, brushes, or towels) used by an infested person is uncommon. *Personal hygiene or cleanliness in the home or school has nothing to do with getting head lice.*
- **Treatment:** Treatment for head lice is recommended for persons diagnosed with an active infestation. All persons in close contact should be checked; those persons with evidence of an active infestation should be treated. Some experts believe prophylactic treatment is prudent for persons who share the same bed with actively-infested individuals. All infested persons and their bedmates should be treated at the same time. Know that some strains of lice are resistant to over-the-counter products and will require chemicals available only by prescription. (See the new [University of Illinois-Edwardsville lice study](#).) Understand that lice remediation often requires more than one treatment application.

Head Lice Resources

- [Sample Letter to Send to Parents](#) Informing Them of Your Lice Issue and Abatement Process at Camp
- CDC: [Head Lice Fact Sheet](#)
- CDC: [Head Lice Treatment Guidelines](#)
- [University of Illinois - Edwardsville lice study](#)
- AAP: [Head Lice Management](#)
- [NPA Web Site](#)
- Definitions, Images, and Biology of Head Lice [Overview](#)

Body Lice

Adult body lice are 2.3–3.6 mm in length. Body lice live and lay eggs on clothing and only move to the skin to feed. Body lice are known to spread disease. Body lice infestations are spread most commonly by close person-to-person contact, but are generally limited to persons who live under conditions of crowding and poor hygiene. Dogs, cats, and other pets do not play a role in the transmission of body lice. Improved hygiene and access to regular changes of clean clothes are the only treatment needed for body lice infestations.

Body Lice Resources

- CDC: [Body Lice Facts](#)

Pubic "Crab" Lice

Adult pubic lice are 1.1–1.8 mm in length. Pubic lice typically are found attached to hair in the pubic area but sometimes are found on coarse hair elsewhere on the body (for example: eyebrows, eyelashes, beard, mustache, chest, armpits, etc.).

Pubic lice infestations (*pthiriasis*, pronounced THIR-i-a-sus) are usually spread through sexual contact. Dogs, cats, and other pets do not play a role in the transmission of pubic lice. Both over-the-counter and prescription medications are available for treatment of pubic lice infestations.

Pubic "Crab" Lice Resources

- CDC: [Pubic Lice Facts](#)

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