

How to visually check for lice with a nit comb

Parents must check their kids for head lice, ideally once a week and especially during critical periods like fall and winter or when returning from vacation. If someone around your child has head lice you may have to check daily. Experts recommend using your bare hands (without gloves) and applying conditioner to the hair before running a comb through it. The conditioner will help prevent the lice from moving around, making them easier to find and remove. However, you should avoid applying conditioner if you intend to treat an infestation with permethrin, because conditioner will reduce the effectiveness of this type of head lice medication.

Follow these steps:

1. You will need warm water, a paper napkin or toilet paper, an ordinary comb or hair brush, a nit comb, a paper towel, and a good light source.



2. Wet the hair with warm water and towel dry. The hair should be damp, not dripping.



3. Rubbing a small amount of conditioner into the hair can make things much easier.

4. Get set up near a good source of light (ideally a window or accent lamp).

5. Comb the hair through with the regular comb or hair brush so it is tangle-free.



6. Start running the nit comb through the hair with the teeth touching the scalp at the top of the head. Draw the comb gently towards the ends of the hair.



7. After each stroke of the nit comb, look closely at the teeth under good lighting.

8. Repeat the last two steps until the entire head has been covered.

9. To search for nits, use a comb to separate the hair into very narrow vertical sections.



10. Under good lighting, spread out the hair in each section and check it from root to tip.

Pay particularly close attention to the back and lower part of the head and the area behind the ears. A magnifying glass can make it easier to spot lice or nits, which range in size from a pin head to a sesame seed.



11. One or more lice on the teeth of the comb means there is an active infestation. Remove these lice by wiping the comb through a piece of paper towel.

12. When you are finished examining the head, clean the comb under the tap and let it soak in head lice medication or warm water for 5 to 10 minutes.

13. Wash your hands after completing the check.

Note: A complete exam should take 10 to 30 minutes, depending on the experience of the person doing the check.

Source: Health Protection Agency North West, U.K. 2010.
http://www.hpa.org.uk/webc/HPAwebFile/HPAweb_C/1296681612732

Photos of the child: M. Barakat, 2012

