

# Symptoms of Head Lice

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Parent, teachers, and other care givers should be aware of the signs and symptoms of a head lice infestation because young children may not be able to express their discomfort directly. The following symptoms should raise the level of suspicion for a head lice infestation:

- **Itching (pruritis)**



- Caused by an allergic reaction to lice bites. When lice feed, they inject a small amount of saliva into the skin. Over time, the host can develop an immune reaction to the saliva which results in inflammation and itching. It may take four to six weeks for this reaction to occur in people infested for the first time. However, itching may not be present in all cases.

- **Sores on the head**

- Rarely, scratching can lead to abrasions on the skin, allowing bacteria to enter and possibly lead to infection. In severe cases, lymph nodes around the head, neck and underarms can become swollen.

- **Tickling sensation**

- Lice movements in the hair may be felt by some infested individuals.

- **Sleeplessness and irritability**

- Lice are more active at night, possibly disrupting sleep.

- **Lice on scalp**

- Lice may be visible but are difficult to spot because they're small, avoid light and move quickly.

- **Lice eggs (nits) on hair shafts**

- Nits stick to hair shafts. Incubating nits may be difficult to see because they're very tiny and camouflaged to match hair color. They're easiest to spot around the ears and the neckline. Empty nits may be easier to spot because they're lighter in color and further from the scalp. However, the presence of nits doesn't necessarily indicate an active infestation.



Some people with head lice infestations have no symptoms. A lack of symptoms does not mean a lack of head lice. See *"Detecting Head Lice"* on how to screen an asymptomatic person.

