



# happy+healthy

your family at its best

## Yikes! He's Got Lice!

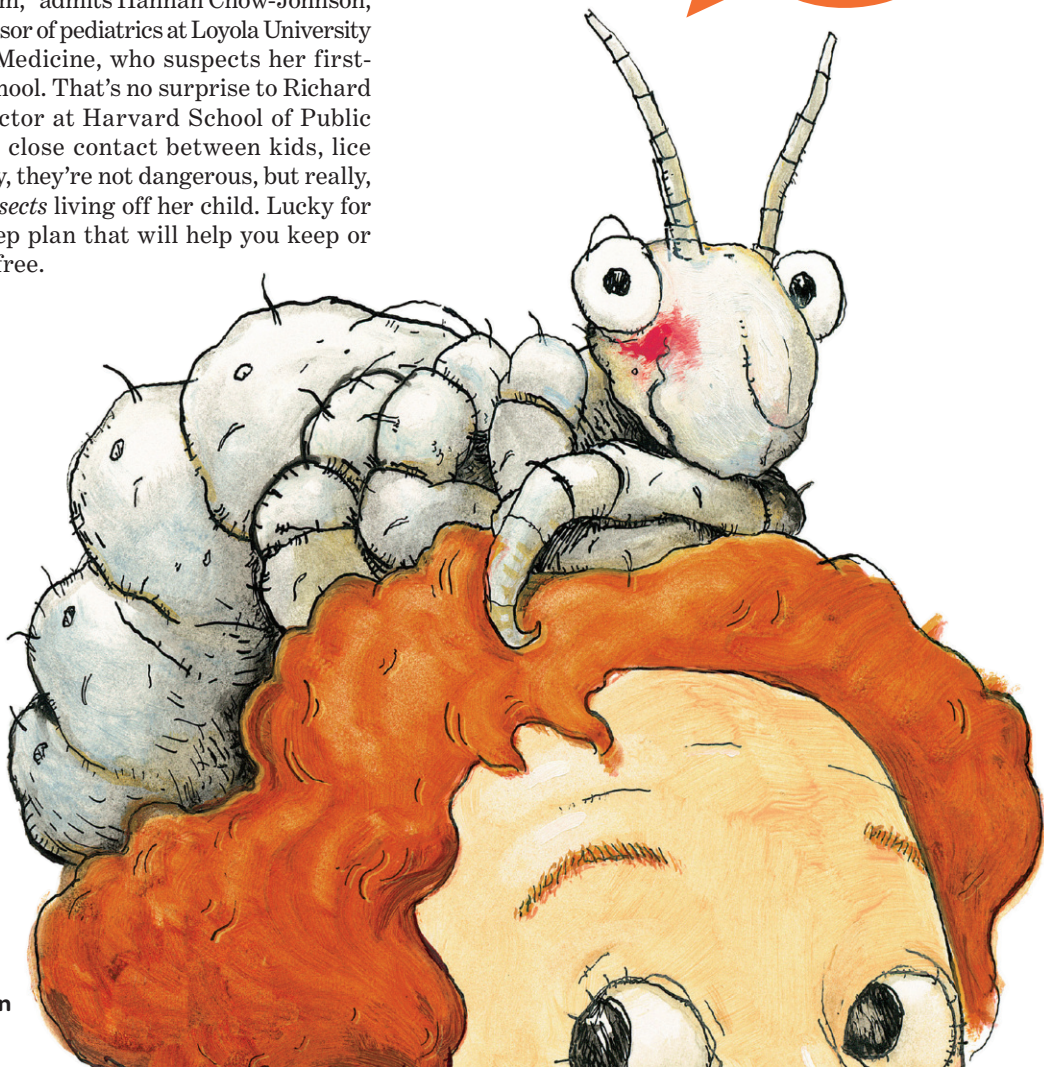
Everything you need to know to beat  
the back-to-school scourge BY HOLLY PEVZNER

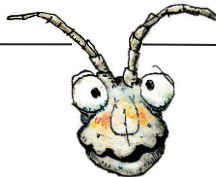
Forget sniffles and coughs; never mind pinkeye. The thing parents *really* fear their kids catching from classmates? Lice. (Cue the head-scratching!) "I was horrified when my daughter had them," admits Hannah Chow-Johnson, M.D., assistant professor of pediatrics at Loyola University Chicago Stritch School of Medicine, who suspects her first-grader picked them up at school. That's no surprise to Richard J. Pollack, Ph.D., an instructor at Harvard School of Public Health. "Whenever there's close contact between kids, lice spread," he says. Fortunately, they're not dangerous, but really, who cares? No one wants *insects* living off her child. Lucky for you, we've got a step-by-step plan that will help you keep or (shudder!) get your kid lice-free.

Worried about  
little old me?  
I only feel like a big problem.  
If your kid is going to  
get infested, I'm your  
best bet!



We love David Shannon's new book, *Bugs in My Hair!* so much that we had to use his hilarious illustrations to bring our lice-protection plan to life! Available September 1 at book stores nationwide (Blue Sky/Scholastic, \$18).





## MEET THE ENEMY

Lice (*Pediculus capitis*) are sesame seed–sized six-legged parasitic insects that reside on the scalp of humans. They get their nutrients by feeding off the blood of their host. (Lovely.) While lice can cause itching, skin infection, and aggravation, they are benign creatures that transmit zero diseases. “Of all the infections or infestations that a kid might catch, head lice are the most trivial,” assures Pollack.

### How to Find 'Em

If you get the dreaded letter that says someone in the class has bugs—and especially if your kid is itching—it's time to go on pest patrol. Here's what to do:

#### ① Know what to look for

Go to [Scholastic.com/lice](https://www.scholastic.com/lice) for images of the live bugs, the nits (eggs), and the casings (hatched eggs). You should be most concerned about actual live lice or eggs that are fat, shiny, and tan. Hatched eggs are clear or white and appear shrunken (no need to treat these alone).

#### ② Get the right tools

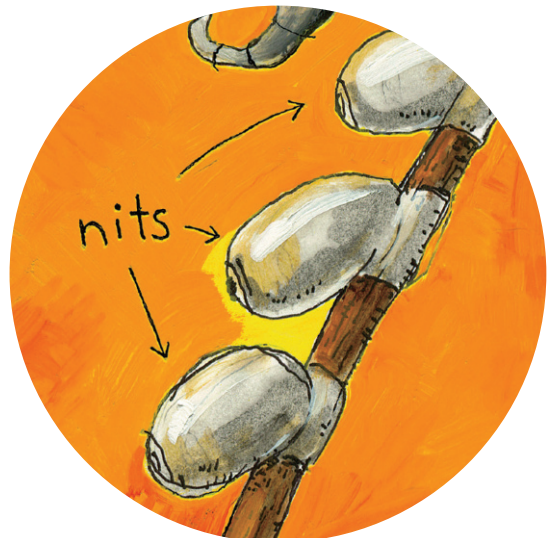
Grab a magnifying glass and buy yourself a lice comb. These bugs are just 2 to 3 mm long, making them hard to spot and even harder to remove. Special lice combs have thin, tightly spaced metal teeth that can collect and crush nits. “It's a more efficient way to diagnose than simply looking,” says Barbara L. Frankowski, M.D., co-author of the American Academy of Pediatrics 2010 report on head lice. One to try: RIDvantage Lice Comb (\$7; drugstores).

#### ③ Wet your kid's hair

Damp hair slows lice down, making them easier to spot. You'll want to keep a close eye on the roots: Lice lay eggs close to the scalp to keep them warm.

#### ④ Start your search

Separate out a small section, and slowly comb through from the roots outward. Make sure the comb's teeth come in close contact with the scalp, since most lice are found within a half-inch of the head. Inspect the comb for any lice, nits, or casings. If you find any, rinse the comb and keep going. After finishing a section, pin hair to the side and repeat. This technique can accurately ID the buggers 90 percent of the time, according to a report in the *Archives of Dermatology*. If no bugs are found, repeat a week later.



#### FAST FACT

Lice are more active at night. If Junior is suddenly having a hard time sleeping, ask him some “Are you itchy?” questions and do a head check.

## How to Get Rid of 'Em

So you've found live lice and/or fat, shiny, unhatched eggs. It's time to choose a treatment. We've got four options below. (Remember, if you spot only shrunken hatched eggs, which are clear or white, treatment isn't necessary.)

### OTC Insecticides

- Look for treatments containing pyrethrins or permethrin. Says Pollack, "These OTC insecticides are inexpensive, effective, and unlikely to cause harm." Find them at your local pharmacy.
- Don't use conditioning products before treatment, since they can prevent meds from adhering.
- Repeat treatment in 7 to 14 days if more lice are found. Still there after a second treatment? Contact your child's pediatrician. A prescription-strength medicine may be required.

### Cetaphil

- Coat your child's hair with Cetaphil and comb it through. Then blow-dry her hair until the cleanser hardens. Shampoo it out eight hours later (or let it sit overnight). "This makes it hard for adult lice to breathe, so they die of suffocation," says Dr. Frankowski. A recent study found this method to be 95 percent successful at removing lice when it was repeated once a week for three weeks.
- Continue to wet-comb hair daily for about two weeks.

### Chem-Free

- LiceMD Pesticide Free is an effective nontoxic, natural product, says Lawrence D. Rosen, M.D., co-author of *Treatment Alternatives for Children*. The active ingredient makes removing nits easier and more effective. Plus, it's odorless.

### Rx Treatment

- Try these meds if lice persist after two OTC treatments, says Pollack. There are several available, and all are effective, but they're not always covered. Check your insurance plan to see what your options are before your doc appointment.

### Should You Call a Pro?

You can hire someone to do just about anything these days—even to remove every egg from your child's head! But if you're already treating the infestation, nit picking is a waste of time. "Nits are firmly attached to the hair shaft. They don't transfer from one head to another," says Dr. Frankowski. "Even if a louse hatched, it takes 7 to 10 days—and a louse of the opposite sex—to start another infestation." Some schools do have a no-nit policy, in which case a little patience and a lot of combing will work fine.





I'm not taking any chances!

## Go on the Defense!

Outside of the classroom, the most common place to catch lice is . . . yep, your home. Once one kid gets them, it can be hard to keep the critters from spreading to the rest of your gang. Here, the best way to protect siblings from catching lice—and proper protocol to prevent a family-wide outbreak.

### \* Don't Get 'Em

- Don't let your child share a bed with a lice-carrying sibling. (To be cautious, also avoid sharing pillows, towels, and linens.)
- Tell your kids no horseplay, hugs, or any head-to-head contact until your child is lice-free. (Same rules go for you, too!)
- Before allowing non-infested kids free rein of the house, vacuum the furniture, carpets, car seats, and other fabric-covered items the lice carrier has put his head on in the past 24 to 48 hours.

### \* Don't Spread 'Em

- If your child gets lice, treat her and do household head-checks regularly.
- Do a one-time wash of all bed linens and recently worn clothes using hot water (130°F), then put them in the dryer.
- While it's unlikely that lice will live long enough on a comb or brush to infect another child, it's smart to resist sharing.
- Although it's rarely necessary, items that cannot be washed can be bagged in plastic for two weeks to kill the bugs.

#### FAST FACT

There are lots of essential-oil-based remedies on the market, but not enough data to support their lice-killing claims.

#### BUSTED!

## 7 LICE MYTHS

### Dirty kids get lice.

Lice are as happy to invade a clean head as a dirty one.

### Lice fly.

Nope. They can't even jump, which makes them unlikely to wander from a child's head to brushes, hats, and headphones. (And if they do, they die soon after.)

### The whole family needs treatment!

Go on scalp patrol if it makes you feel better, but there is absolutely no need to treat people who are not infested.

### You can stop lice.

Scientists have yet to discover a way to repel the critters.

### Sharing hats is risky.

Not true. Since the bugs die quickly after losing contact with their host human, swapping baseball caps poses little threat, assures Pollack.

### My child will miss a ton of school.

Probably not. The American Academy of Pediatrics states that no child should be kept out of school because of lice. Talk with his teacher and principal about concerns they might have.

### I need to fumigate the house!

A louse that falls from your child's hair today will likely die by tomorrow from starvation. Focus on frequently used fabric-covered areas.