

THE NEXT STEP Toward a Healthier Future

A BI-MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE SEBASTOPOL TOXICS EDUCATION PROGRAM



Less-Toxic Lice Control: A Parent's Advice

If you've had young children, you've likely experienced head lice. What usually happens is: your child comes home with a note that a kid in his or her class has lice. You check your kid's head after dinner and are shocked to find something suspicious. After panicking, you send your partner to the store for whatever they can find. You treat the whole family before you have time to read the label's fine print. Sound familiar?

Although head lice don't signify uncleanliness, spread disease, or lead to health issues — it is upsetting to find bugs living in your child's hair. So it's tempting to use a strong treatment in the hopes of ending the problem fast.

Unfortunately, though, traditional lice products often contain neurotoxic chemicals that do not belong on your child's head. Plus they're not the most effective remedies, and often fail because many lice have developed resistance.

Fortunately, there are safe and reliable treatment options.

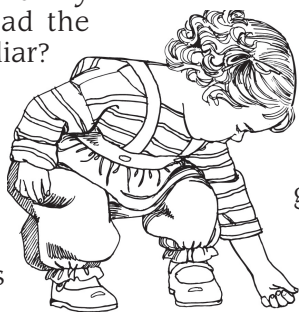
Your First Steps

1) Identify if any family members have head lice. Look here for how to do this: www.airalle.com/how-to-know-if-you-have-head-lice. Treat all affected people simultaneously. (Head lice don't live on pets.)

2) Kill the lice. Apply a product with dimethicone oil (ideally 100%) to hair, then comb or brush it to detangle.

3) Comb out the nits (eggs). Nit combing is always needed, no matter what product you use in Step 2. Nits are glued to hair shaft near the scalp. What's key is to use a professional metal lice comb (like the LiceMeister). For specific instructions, see www.headlice.com/lice-comb. Also, if you're working on fine hair, thicken it with a little baking soda.

4) Wash and dry hair, then re-check. Using a strong lamp, flashlight, or best of all, direct sunlight, search hair for remaining nits. When you see a suspicious object, blow on it. If it blows away, it's probably dandruff. If it stays glued to the hair, it's likely a nit. Comb until complete. Before putting your comb away, soak it in 150°F water



for 15 minutes. Wash your treatment clothes, and your child's.

5) Wash anything that touched your child's head over the last two days. Clothes, bedding, stuffed animals, etc. can go in a hot dryer for 30 minutes. Upholstery and carpets can be vacuumed; don't forget the car seat! Immerse hair brushes in boiling water for 15 minutes or wash with isopropyl alcohol. Delicate items can be sealed in a plastic bag for two weeks.

6) Check hair every day for 10 to 12 days, and re-treat as needed. Frequent nit combing is also helpful.

Still Not Working?

Use enzymes. Spray special enzymes onto dry hair, such as Nit Glue

STEP Updates

■ **Thank you to everyone who has sent in your yellow STEP Feedback cards.** Your comments really do help us serve your needs. As usual, we'll report the survey results in the next issue.

■ **If you can't find your Feedback card, you can get a substitute** at www.healthyworld.org/STEPsurvey.html. Please send it in as soon as possible. Even just saying that you like it helps! If you're a Sebastopol resident, it's great to write that on the printout, plus your name and address, so it'll be counted in the official tally.

Dissolver; they're said to dissolve the nit glue and help dislodge nits.

■ **Seek professional help.** For instance, local school staff have referred tough cases to Petaluma's Marin Lice Remedies.

This "lice salon" uses a specialized heated air device plus dimethicone oil and an enzyme comb-out — and guarantees the treatment. It's expensive (around \$200) but can be a godsend for a busy parent, especially to treat oneself. The salon also sells products, such as 100% dimethicone, enzymes, and professional combs. (www.lca-northbay.com, 415/328-1350)

School Policies

Some schools have "no-nit" policies, which mean that a child can't attend school if they have any nits, even dead ones. However, these policies are outdated and contrary to the California Department of Public Health (CDPH) guidelines. There's no evidence that no-nit policies shorten outbreaks, and they unnecessarily keep children away from learning. If school staff seeks to keep your child out of school for what you think are dead nits, you can ask if the school has seen and adopted the CDPH guidelines at <http://bit.ly/2nS11LV>.

~ By Megan Kaun (with Patricia Dines)

Megan Kaun is an environmental engineer and mother of two who is devoted to promoting toxic-free environments. Her email is megan.kaun@gmail.com.

For more on this topic, see over.

More About Lice Control

■ **So, how common are head lice?** There are between 6 and 12 million cases of head lice each year in the U.S. It's the second most common ailment among children, after colds. About 80% of U.S. schools have at least one outbreak a year.

■ **What's the problem with common products?** Many contain harmful toxic chemicals.

Urvashi Rangan, Ph.D., Director of Consumer Safety for Consumer Reports, says "There's no reason for parents to douse their children's heads in chemicals.... Many parents turn to popular over-the-counter treatments like RID [or Nix]. Consumer Reports says, based on mounting evidence, those chemicals are not the best choices."

Also, these mainstream lice products often fail, because of widespread lice resistance to their main ingredients. (Learn more at <https://tinyurl.com/mhbgzy5>.)

■ **Ingredients of concern.**

• **Lindane.** This is banned for agriculture internationally, and lice use in California. So don't use it in an old bottle. It's a known human carcinogen and potent neurotoxin that can cause rashes, dizziness, vomiting, brain damage, seizures, and death.

• **Permethrin and pyrethrin.** These ingredients — in RID, Nix, and more — are neurotoxins and

likely human carcinogens. Harm can include headaches, dizziness, rash, burning and swelling of the eyes, asthma, reproductive issues, and heart failure. They're also very toxic to fish and bees. Plus products can often contain other toxic materials, to try to enhance their effect. (Learn more at <http://bit.ly/2BVbLTN>.)

• **Malathion** might be prescribed by a doctor. This organophosphate insecticide can cause headaches, nausea, vomiting, burning eyes, irritated skin, lightheadedness, and difficulty breathing. It's been linked to cancer and genetic damage. Plus it harms fish, birds, amphibians, and earthworms. (Always ask your doctor what they're prescribing, so you can research it before getting it.)

Note: The CDC doesn't recommend any of these products for children under 2 years old — only combing.

■ **Better alternatives.**

• **Natural oils.** Coconut or olive oil can be applied in Step 2. However dimethicone is considered more effective in actually killing lice.

• **Dimethicone** is a silicone that kills lice by hardening within their breathing apparatus. It's proven effective, avoids resistance issues, and is considered safe enough to be in general skin products (although it's not ideal there, because it blocks the skin's normal respiration). Other toxics can be added to these products, so 100% dimethicone is ideal. Learn

Disclaimer: This newsletter offers general summary content for informational purposes only. It is not intended as medical advice. Please do your own research, and consult with your medical professional regarding your particular health situation.

more at www.rapunzelslice.com/how-dimethicone-kills-lice and www.bewell.com/blog/the-truth-behind-the-common-cosmetics-ingredient-dimethicone.

■ **More tips.**

• **Labels.** Before buying or using a product, read the label to evaluate its ingredients, and take any warnings and instructions seriously.

• **Combing.** Studies show that using a good comb is more effective than malathion or permethrin shampoos. Also, be especially thorough around the ears and nape of the neck, where most eggs are laid.

• **Cleaning the house.** You can also freeze hair brushes and stuffed animals for 10 hours at 5° or colder. Skip lice house sprays, which are not helpful and often toxic.

• **Prevention.** Head-to-head contact is the most common transmission path. But you can also help avoid issues by telling your children not to share commonly infested items, such as combs, brushes, hats, scarves, pillows, and blankets.

Please let us know what less-toxic options worked best for you!

~ By Patricia Dines

Timely Tips

■ **The next Sebastopol Toxics Collections Day is Tuesday March 20**, from 4 to 8pm. To make an appointment, call 707/795-2025 or 877/747-1870 at least 24 hours beforehand. You can also drop items at the Household Toxics Facility.

■ **For more about local toxics disposal**, see www.recyclenow.org or call 707/565-3375.

■ **Get more information about avoiding toxics through our handy STEP Online Index.** All of our past articles on toxics and alternatives are conveniently arranged there for you. Just go to www.healthyworld.org/STEPIndex.html

healthyworld.org/STEPIndex.html and look for your topic of interest.

For instance, see **Gardening** for overview information. Also look under your specific topic, such as crabgrass, snails and slugs, whiteflies, weeds, dandelions, organic fertilizers, composting, companion planting, rose care, sticky (insect) barriers, seed saving, permaculture, government policy — and more!

The STEP Index also offers handy information on other timely topics, such as healthier **housecleaning**, less-toxic approaches to **ants** and **mold**, evaluation of toxics such as **Roundup**, and spring **"weeds" (herbs) that you can eat!**

ABOUT STEP

The Next STEP (TNS) is published six times a year by the **Sebastopol Toxics Education Program (STEP)**. STEP is a project of the **City of Sebastopol**, implemented by local citizen volunteers. **STEP's mission** is to support city residents in reducing their toxic use and exposure, creating a healthier and safer Sebastopol for everyone.

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