

Tick Bites and Head Lice



Tick bites do not usually cause any lasting medical problems, but can occasionally pose serious health conditions. So its good to know how to best treat tick bites.

What are ticks?

Ticks are external parasites which feed on blood, and are a member of the arachnid family (along with spiders, scorpions and mites). The paralysis tick most commonly causes problems for people and animals, and can be found in certain areas along the eastern seaboard of Australia.

Once on the skin of a human or animal, the tick embeds itself in the skin and swells up with blood. It can be many days before it is detected. There are several stages of development that the tick goes through, which often leads people to mistake them for different types of ticks. The infants, known as 'grass ticks', are almost invisible to the naked eye and cover the skin with multitudes of tiny red bites. These larval ticks can be impossible to remove with tweezers. One way of dealing with them is to give your child a 30 minute bath, which contains 1 cup bicarbonate of soda.

The juveniles are commonly known as bush ticks while the fully grown adults are shell-backs or paralysis ticks. The adult females swell with blood and can become very large, causing anything from local irritation to a number of serious health threats.

In order to feed and produce eggs, the tick injects saliva laced with toxic chemicals which stimulates blood flow. Early detection is recommended, taking care to not touch or disturb the tick before attempting to remove it.

Tick bites do not usually cause any lasting medical problems, but can occasionally pose serious health conditions, such as paralysis, tick typhus and Lyme's disease (no reported cases in Australia). Typhus starts with a fever after the initial bite, and leads to a stiff neck and joints. The condition can be confirmed with blood tests and is treated effectively with antibiotics.

Paralysis is the most common condition associated with ticks with symptoms most likely to cause problems in children less than five years (and to pets). The early symptoms of paralysis are a rash, headache, fever, unsteadiness of movement, weakness of limbs and partial facial paralysis. The site of the bite will usually remain extremely itchy, with localised swelling which may last for up to two weeks.

What to do with ticks

It is generally accepted that it is best not to kill the tick before removal (with methylated spirits or tea-tree oil) as this causes it to inject more toxins into the body. However, the tick can be sprayed with an aerosol repellent (containing pyrethrin) as this has a narcotic effect upon the tick and does not cause the tick to dump poison.

When removing a tick, use fine tweezers and grasp the tick as close to the skin as possible, pulling gently in an upwards motion. Avoid squeezing the body as this can also cause the tick to deposit toxins into the bite area.

Some people may have a severe allergic reaction to tick bites called anaphylaxis, and although this is relatively rare, it is a medical emergency and requires immediate assistance on 000.

How to minimise the likelihood of tick bites

a. Avoid tick infested areas as much as possible. Ticks are commonly found in dense, bushy areas, especially leafy mulch and long grass. They tend to be fairly immobile, and move about by attaching to humans, pets and livestock. Make sure children are aware of risky areas, and check them thoroughly when they come in from a bush walk or playing in gardens. Ticks favour the back of the head and behind the ears. Brush off clothing when first entering the house.

b. Ticks may be carried into the house on pets and can spread to children, especially if pets are allowed on the furniture or to sleep on children's beds. Check your animals frequently and use combination flea and tick preparations available from vets (such as Frontline and Advantage.)

c. When working, walking or playing in areas where ticks are commonly found, it can be helpful to spray clothing with insect repellents (or a product containing lemon eucalyptus called citridiol). Additionally, try wearing light coloured clothing for easy detection of ticks. Keep risky areas brush-cut and mown as much as possible.

Head Lice

First and foremost, head lice are not dirty or a sign of negligence, despite the historical stigma and bad press. It is a fact of modern life that most children will catch lice at least once, if not multiple times, during their childhood.

It is important, however, to learn to spot the telltale signs: intense itchiness of the scalp, tiny red bite spots on the scalp, and small white bumps near the base of the hairs. Once children are mixing socially, such as at day care or pre-school, it is a good idea to check their hair regularly. Schools will usually notify parents of an outbreak.

This is the time to arm yourself with a metal lice comb. The plastic ones are useless as the eggs just slip right through. The eggs of head lice (nits) usually take 7 to 10 days to hatch. Live eggs and head lice are not easily spotted on the head. Intensive detection twice a week for 2 - 4 weeks is the key. The nits are easier to see than the almost transparent adults.

Facts about lice

- Contrary to popular opinion, recent studies insist that it is unnecessary to disinfect all clothing, toys and bedding. Treat the live infestation, remove nits (eggs) as much as possible and treat combs and brushes.
- Latest research maintains that the use of neuro-toxic chemicals to treat head lice is expensive and uncalled for. In addition, head lice often build up resistance to particular products. Special lice combs used in conjunction with normal conditioner are just as effective and less toxic to your child.
- Combing wet conditioned hair with a lice comb is a reliable detection and eradication method, since wet lice stay still. Dry or damp lice move quickly thus avoiding detection. Remove lice onto a tissue with each comb-through and repeat this process regularly.
- Use preventative measures by filling a spray bottle with a tea-tree, lavender and water solution. Apply in the mornings prior to school. Make sure each family member has their own brush, for their use only.

The head louse is a tiny, wingless parasitic insect that lives among human hairs and feeds on tiny amounts of blood drawn from the scalp. Lice (the plural of louse) are a very common problem, especially for kids. They're contagious, annoying, and often tough to get rid of.





Want more information?

Raising Children Network

For information on raising children
www.raisingchildren.net.au

Parents website

www.parents.com

Kids Health

<http://kidshealth.org/en/parents/head-lice.html>

Department of Health

<http://www.health.gov.au>

Parent Helpline

Phone 1300 1300 52

9am - 9pm weekdays and 4pm - 9pm weekends
for advice on child health and parenting

Local Services

Lismore Community Health - Child and Family

Phone 02 6620 7687

8am – 5pm, Monday to Friday to make an appointment.

Goonellabah Child and Family Health Centre:

Phone 02 6625 0111

9am – 4:30pm, Monday to Friday to make an appointment.

www.healthdirect.gov.au