



CoSCEP

Coalition to Stop Children's Exposure to Pesticides

A Project of the Pesticide Education Center, San Francisco, California

Consumer Pesticide Safety Series

4 Head Lice

A JN article other side →

Nontoxic Lice Shampoo

When my book "Designer Poisons" was published in 1995, there were no commercial or prescription lice shampoos that I felt could safely be used on children. So in Chapter 9, I recommended soap shampoo and nit removal combs.

Lice shampoos without toxic chemicals are now available. They are made from grain-based enzymes and do not contain pesticides. They dissolve the "glue" that the nit uses to stick to the hair shaft. They are not required to be registered as pesticides with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

A product that I recommend is called LiceBGone. I first learned of this product from school nurses, who were enthusiastic supporters of nontoxic methods for lice control. It is inexpensive (\$4.00 or less per treatment), and easy to use.

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- ❖ **The shampoo is applied to dry hair, left on for 60 minutes, (covering head with a shower cap useful but not necessary) rinsed out, and the nits combed out with a regular or a fine tooth comb.**
 - ❖ **Women who are pregnant or nursing can treat themselves and/or their children as it will not affect the developing child, or get into breast milk.**
 - ❖ **It can safely be reapplied as often as necessary – but in the majority of cases one treatment is sufficient.**
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How to Order LiceBGone

Toll free : 1-877-730-2727

Email: info@licebgone.com Website: www.licebgone.com

It is often difficult for new products to get shelf space in chain stores, so it may not be available over-the-counter in your area. I encourage you to try to get local stores and chains to carry them.

Pesticide Education Center: P.O. Box 225279, San Francisco, CA 94122. 415-665-4722 email: pec@igc.org
www.pesticides.org. *Designer Poisons, How to Protect Your Health and Home from Toxic Pesticides* by Dr. Marion Moses is available for \$15.00 prepaid from the center.

Local Contact Information:

ManaSota-88: P.O. Box 1728, Nokomis, FL 34274. Telephone 941-966-6256 Fax 941-966-0659
email: nfo@manasota88.org Website: www.manasota88.org

CoSCEP: P.O. Box 15853 Sarasota, FL 34277. Telephone 941-954-2291, Fax 941-954-0004

Marion Moses, MD

A Simple Matter of Grooming

Stop using toxic pesticides to treat head lice.

I will never forget coming home from school one day with more than my homework. My usually calm mother reacted with horror and shame and a fit—literally—of fine-tooth-comb nit-picking (after dousing my head with kerosene). Decades later, while working as a nurse with farm workers in California's Central Valley, I remember a young visitor to our trailer clinic who climbed into my lap. I found myself looking not into her beautiful brown eyes, but a mass of nits (eggs) in her hair.

As always, I went to the community women to see what they were using for head lice. Their homemade boric acid bait had been successful against cockroaches. This time, however, all they knew was "lindano," or lindane (Kwell and others), which in the late 1960s was readily available over the counter. And although lindane, one of the most toxic products ever used for the control of lice, is no longer considered a first-line treatment for lice in the United States, it has been replaced by other toxic insecticides, such as pyrethrins and pyrethroids (Nix, Rid, and others) and malathion (Ovide and others).

Head lice will never make the parasite hall of fame: they don't kill the host or cause other diseases. Yet they remain a persistent problem (even though some providers shrug off infestation as a minor public health concern), and since head lice are the most

common communicable childhood health problem after the common cold, controlling them leads to avoidable exposure of children to toxic substances.

While infestation with lice isn't fatal, deaths from asthma and bronchospasm in users of pyrethrins have occurred. Lindane is a potent neurotoxin that can cause seizures and has been linked to several deaths. Permethrin can cause itching,



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redness, and swelling on the scalp and can trigger asthma and allergies. An unknown amount of exposure to children occurs from prophylactic use, when a parent learns of an outbreak and uses a toxic shampoo without evidence of infestation.

Head lice can be controlled without insecticides. More than 20 years ago it was suggested that one could just dissolve the glue-like material that bonds nits to the hair shaft—simply loosen the glue and comb out the nits. This is just what shampoos made with enzymes from natural vegetable extracts do. The best example I've found is Lice B Gone (from Safe Effective Alternatives, www.safealternatives.com), a highly effective treatment that is inexpensive and simple to use, usually requiring only one 60-minute treatment. It is nontoxic, can be used repeat-

edly without harm (although that isn't usually necessary), and can be safely used to treat pregnant or nursing women as well as children. Another enzyme-based treatment is Lice Away Enzyme Shampoo (Nature's Best, www.naturesbestenzyme.com).

Why are these products not on every drug store and supermarket shelf in the country? Primarily because of human resistance to change. Remember that the British navy refused to follow James Lind's recommendation that citrus be given to sailors until 42 years after he published the findings of his study proving that it prevented scurvy. Ignaz Semmelweis was ridiculed when he suggested that doctors wash their hands and change bloody sheets between patients to prevent puerperal sepsis (childbed fever).

Treating head lice can be a simple act of grooming. Florence Nightingale saved thousands of British soldiers in Scutari during the Crimean War using basic public health principles of cleanliness. I foresee a day when the same is true of controlling lice. Parents are eager for safe products for their children.

Health professionals should ask themselves why they are willing to recommend a poison but balk at a simple, over-the-counter product that in almost all cases produces nit-free children after one treatment. The anxiety and inappropriate practices surrounding infestation with head lice will disappear when it is finally seen as the easily solvable problem it is. All it will take is for humans to do that most-difficult thing—change their thinking. ▼

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