

Treatment-resistant 'Super Lice' found in Texas and 24 other states

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Finding a solution for treating [head lice](#) may leave a lot of parents scratching their heads. Just picking up a box of over-the-counter head [lice](#) treatment may no longer be enough, that's because a new breed of "super lice" have been identified in Texas and in 24 other states.



Photo by Sean Gallup/Getty Images

Over-the-counter topical solutions such as Rid and Nix, as well as their generic equivalents have been the go-to answer when children come home from school or daycare scratching their heads a little more than usual. These medications contain the active ingredients permethrin or pyrethrin, a class of chemicals called pyrethroids.

The general population has used products containing pyrethroids with such frequency, and over an extended period of time, that lice have become resistant to them; and the ingredients that once killed the insects, no longer do. So what can one do when confronted with a case of head lice?

There are prescription medications available from your physician that use chemicals other than pyrethroids, that may be effective; they may also be expensive.

Some parents may wish to take a more natural approach to the problem, employing natural products like essential oils.

"I have noticed that more and more parents are using healthier options and more natural deterrents for lice, such as tea tree oil," said Susan C. Stevens, director of the Albany Children's Center in California, in an interview with *Healthline*. "Parents use a shampoo or conditioner with this ingredient to repel lice."

Healthline also reports usage of ingredients such as coconut oil, eucalyptus oil, lavender oil, menthol, or rosemary oil. But just like any drug, continued use of the products could lead to [treatment resistance](#).

"People think these chemicals are safe because they're from nature. But they are very potent natural oils," said Kyong Yoon, Ph.D., lead researcher in the study published in the *Journal of Medical Entomology*. "These products are easy to access, but there's a potential problem. They'll become resistant."

A drug-free, hands-on approach could be the solution for some. Head lice have become big business for some, as salons specializing in head lice removal are popping up all over the country. For a fee, someone will determine if a lice infestation is present on the head, then go about removing the insects and their eggs (called nits) with a fine-toothed comb, or a combination of comb and oil-based solution.

"Business is booming," said Penelope Good, founder of Licebeaters, a "nitpicking" company based in Long Island, New York, in an interview with *CNN*. "It's surprising how savvy the parents are, with the Internet and everything, and they know that over-the-counter stuff is not going to work."

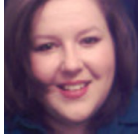
But over-the-counter head lice medications may not be obsolete just yet, in fact, experts suggest they should still be the first treatment option, as not every case of [head lice](#) may be treatment-resistant, and over-the-counter shampoo treatments are affordable.

"No one ever died of a head lice infestation," said Dr. Barbara L. Frankowski, professor of pediatrics at the University of Vermont, in an interview with *CNN*.

Head lice are not known to carry disease, but exposure to the insect's saliva can lead to itching and irritation on the scalp. Steps should be taken to remove the bugs and their eggs from the scalp and hair shaft to eliminate the infestation and associated symptoms.

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