

EPIDEMIOLOGY OF HUMAN LICE IN ISRAEL

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Since 1990 over 16,000 school and kindergarten children in Israel were examined for infestation with head lice using a louse comb. Fifteen to 20% of the children were found to be infested with living lice and eggs and another 25-30% had signs of previous lice infestations e.g., dead eggs or egg-shells (nits). Approximately 75% of Israeli children are infested at least once in their life with lice, and more than 50% of them become infested at least once a year. Girls were twice more infested than boys. The incidence of infestation was highest among children 4-12 years of age. Differences in the infestation rate were also related to the length, structure and color of the hair. Approximately 80% of nit-infested children had nits that were 2-5 cm away from the scalp, showing that the oviposition had occurred during the previous 2-5 months and that the infestation had meanwhile been successfully treated. Approximately 78% of infested children had 1-10 lice on their heads and only 0.3% had more than 50 lice.

In the early 1960's head lice were found mainly among people belonging to the lower socioeconomic classes. Although today, lice are found in all socioeconomic levels, children of fathers with fewer years of schooling, children whose fathers were born in Israel, and children of younger mothers were all at higher risk of infestation.

In 1991, newly arrived Ethiopian immigrants were screened for lice. Of the 304 individuals examined, 65% were infested with head lice and 39% with body lice.