

General Information on Pediculosis (Head Lice)

Because there have been concerns expressed regarding head lice in the schools, the school nurses have put together this information sheet.

Who gets it?...

Every year 10-12 million children get lice. Anyone can get lice. Dirt does not cause lice! In fact, lice do not like dirt and prosper more readily on a clean scalp rather than a neglected one.

What do they look like?...

Adult Louse

Baby Louse

Actual size

How do they travel?...

Lice do NOT jump, hop or fly but do move quickly and avoid light. This sometimes makes it difficult to find them. They crawl along the hair shaft using small claws.

Louse habits...

Head lice live on the human scalp and only the human scalp. They do not live on pets. They live by biting and sucking blood from the human scalp. A louse can lay 10 eggs each day. The eggs are called NITS. The nits are attached to the hair with a glue like substance that makes it very difficult to remove the nits. Eggs hatch in about 7-10 days. The entire life cycle from egg hatching to egg laying is about 2 weeks. An adult will live for up to 30 days. An average female louse produces between 200-300 eggs in her life span. Over 90% will hatch if not removed. Adult lice can live up to 2 days and nits can live up to 10 days (without a human host).

How do you get it?...

Head lice are usually transmitted through close personal contact with an infested individual or through use of shared combs, brushes, or other grooming aides as well as through sharing of hats, caps, sleeping bags, pillows, etc.

Other places we don't always think about...airplanes, buses, carpools, movie theaters, waiting rooms, libraries, and trying on clothing – especially hats, sleepovers and contact sports.

What to look for...

Itching is the most common symptom. However, up to half of children do not itch. Close inspection of the hair and scalp with a strong light and magnifying glass will sometimes reveal the adult lice, but most likely you will see nits. These are tiny yellowish white or grayish white eggs which are shaped like a tear drop. Freshly laid, they are transparent and blend in with all hair colors so they are hard to see.

Actual size

It is a myth that nits further than ½ inch from the scalp are dead. Living eggs have been found up to 8 inches from the scalp. This is why complete nit removal is so important!

- OVER -

I see one...now what?...

All family members should be examined for lice. Experts recommend treating the whole family whether or not they have lice. Do not treat children less than 2 years of age, remove lice and eggs by hand.

Lice treatment is a job for an adult. All lice shampoos are potent pesticides. Rid or Nix brand names are recommended. These shampoos may be obtained from the pharmacy, from your doctor or a prescription from the school nurse. The directions **MUST** be followed exactly. There is no lice shampoo which is 100% effective against lice and eggs. Retreatment is recommended at one week. **DO NOT** re-wash hair for 1-2 days after treatment. Real mayonnaise (not salad dressing, light or fat-free mayo) or hair gel can be used instead of lice shampoo. Cover head with shower cap and leave on overnight for at least 8 hours.

Remove all dead lice and nits. It is important to remove each and every nit to prevent them from hatching and reinfesting the child or family again. To aid in the removal of nits, hair can be soaked in a white vinegar solution (3% to 5% acetic acid) followed by application of a damp towel soaked in the same solution for 30-60 minutes before attempting nit removal.

Launder bedding, clothes, coat/hats and all possibly contaminated items in hot water (130 degrees F) and put in clothes dryer for 20 minutes. Vacuum couches, carpets, mattresses, auto seats. (*Vacuuming will be as effective and safer than using pesticide sprays.) Non-washable items should be dry-cleaned or sealed in plastic bags for 2 weeks.

Family combs, brushes, barrettes, headbands, and hair scrunchies must be soaked in a lice shampoo for 20 minutes or preferably, overnight.

Notify parents of children, relatives and daycare providers who might have been exposed to your child and ask them to check for lice or nits. Make sure you notify the school so that contacts can be checked there.

Finally...

Nit removal is the most vital step many parents fail to do completely. **REMEMBER...ONE** remaining nit that hatches will soon lay eggs and you'll have to go through the whole procedure again!!

Your child(ren) should return to school when initial treatment is complete, all nits are removed from the hair and clothing changed or laundered; no more than 1-2 days of school should be missed.