

HEAD LICE

PERSONAL HEALTH FACT SHEET

What are Head Lice?

Head lice are small insects, about the size of a sesame seed. They live on the scalp and feed by sucking blood. Head lice may turn colors from white or grey to red or dark brown when they are filled with blood. After the female louse mates, she lays four or five nits which are glued so strongly to the hair shafts that ordinary washing and brushing of the hair will not remove them. After seven to ten days the nits hatch, new lice mature, mate, and begin the cycle of infestation all over again, if not treated. A single louse can lay as many as 150 eggs during its typical 30-day life span. Hundreds of nits may be found on the head of an infested person.

How is it spread?

Head lice is spread by head to head contact; or by sharing personal items such as hats, combs, brushes, ribbons, barrettes, coats, towels or bedding. Lice can also be spread by the placing your head on furniture, rugs, or car seats recently used by someone with lice. Theater and airline seats and head phones are sometimes linked to spread of the insect, as are piling coats, hats, scarfs on top of each other.

How is it treated?

- Contact your doctor or the Health Department to verify the need for treatment.
- If infected at the same time, all family members should be checked for head lice and treated.
- Non-prescription lice shampoo or creme rinse is available at the drug store. Read and follow the directions carefully.
- Do NOT treat pregnant women, nursing mothers, infants, or children under 2. (Consult with a physician).
- If new nits or newly hatched lice are found, retreat according to manufacturers' recommendations, usually 7-10 days after the initial treatment.
- After shampooing, the nits (eggs) must be removed with a metal nit comb.
- Check head and remove nits daily.

What else should be done?

- Machine wash all clothing & bedding in hot soapy water and dry in a hot, machine dryer for at least 20 minutes.
- Head lice and nits can be killed either by freezing for 24 hours or by sealing articles in plastic bags for 14 days.
- Combs and brushes can be cleaned effectively by soaking in hot water (140-165 degrees F) for 15 minutes or washing with lice shampoo.
- Vacuum mattresses, pillows, carpeting, upholstered furniture, and car upholstery. Maintain these good

SYMPTOMS OF HEAD LICE

- Itching, especially around the ears and back of the neck.
- Head lice do not cause disease, but infection may develop at scratch sites.
- Evidence of crawling lice or nits attached to the hair.

How are head lice prevented?

- Head Lice treatments should not be used for prevention.
- Do not share personal items: combs, brushes, hats.
- If not in use, place hats and scarves in coat pockets.
- Notify school staff and playmates' parents to be alert of additional cases.



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