

## Head Lice (Pediculosis) Fact Sheet

### What are head lice?

- Head lice are parasitic insects that live in the hair and scalp of humans. They need human blood to survive.
- Head lice are spread from head to head by direct contact.
- Head lice can infest anyone, regardless of personal hygiene.
- Head lice are usually treatable with lice-killing shampoos and cream rinses.
- To prevent infection: avoid direct contact with the head, hair, clothing, or personal belongings of a person with head lice, and treat affected persons, their contacts, and their households.

### How are head lice spread?

Head lice are spread easily from person to person by direct contact. People can get head lice by:

- Coming into close contact with an already infested person. In children, contact is common during play, fall and spring sports that require helmet use, trying or sharing of dance or Halloween costumes, while riding the school bus, and during classroom activities in which children sit in groups close to each other or throwing coats in a common pile.
- Wearing infested clothing, such as hats, scarves, coats, sports uniforms, helmets, hair jewelry, or costumes.
- Using infested combs, brushes, or towels.
- Lying on a contaminated bed, couch, pillow, carpet, or stuffed animals.
- Lice do not jump or fly. Lice are not spread to humans from pets or other animals. Lice walk, eat, and lay eggs (nits)

### What are the signs and symptoms of head lice?

- Itching---the body's allergic reaction to the bite or to the movement of the lice.

### How is an infestation diagnosed?

- Head lice infestation is diagnosed by looking closely through the hair and scalp for nits (eggs), nymphs (immature lice), or adult lice.
- Nits are the easiest to see. They are found "glued" to the hair shaft. Unlike dandruff or hairspray, they will not slide along the strand of hair. If you find nits more than a ¼ inch from the scalp, the infestation may be an old one. They are all uniform in shape (teardrop) and can appear different colors on different hair colors.
- Nymphs and adults can be hard to find; there are usually few of them, and they can move quickly from searching fingers. If lice are seen, finding nits close to the scalp confirms that a person is infested. If you are not sure if a person has head lice, the diagnosis should be made by a healthcare provider or school nurse.

### **What is the treatment for head lice infestation?**

- Consult with your pediatrician regarding treatment.
- Treat based on the shampoo manufacturer's directions.
- Check hair and remove all nits for a period of 2 weeks after treatment using a reputable lice comb.
- TOTAL NIT REMOVAL IS THE MOST EFFECTIVE WAY TO PREVENT RE-INFESTATION.
- Continue to check all family members weekly for one month to prevent a reoccurrence.

### **How do I treat the household?**

- To kill lice and nits, machine wash all washable clothing, coats, backpacks and bed linens that the infested person touched during the 3 days before they were diagnosed. Wash clothes and linens in the HOT water cycle. Dry items on high heat for at least 20 minutes.
- Dry clean clothing that is not washable (coats, hats, scarves, etc.) OR
- Seal all non-washable items (clothing, stuffed animals, comforters, etc.) in a plastic bag for at least 2 weeks.
- Soak combs and brushes for 1 hour in hot water (1 gallon water mixed with ¼ cup household bleach).
- Vacuum beds, upholstered furniture, rugs, and car interior. When finished, discard the vacuum bag or empty contents of bag less vacuum and store outside.

### **How common is head lice infestation?**

Head lice infestation is a very common condition, especially among children ages 3-10. As many as 6 -12 million people worldwide get head lice each year. Outbreaks of head lice occur often in group setting worldwide.

### **How can head lice be prevented?**

- Outbreaks of head lice have nothing to do with a family's income, social status, or level of personal hygiene. They generally do not cause disease.
- Avoid direct contact with a person who has lice, or with their clothing or personal belongings.
- Watch for signs of lice, such as frequent head scratching. Nits do not cause symptoms, but they can be seen on the hair shaft; they are yellow-white and teardrop shaped.
- Teach children not to share combs, brushes, scarves, hair ribbons, helmets, hats, towels, bedding, clothing, or other personal items.

### **What is my child's school policy on head lice?**

- If we discover a child with evidence of head lice at school, we will notify a parent that treatment is necessary.
- The parent will be asked to pick up the child at the close of the school day.
- When treatment has been completed and nits removed from the hair, the parent will bring the child to the clinic to be assessed by clinic staff to ensure live lice are not present and nits have been removed.
- The parent will bring the box/bottle of the treatment used on their child as proof of treatment.

- If it can be determined that progress has been made on nit removal and no live lice are present, the child will be permitted to stay at school with the understanding that the parent will continue to remove nits until the child is lice/nit free. Throughout the week after readmission to school, the student will be reassessed periodically by clinic staff to determine that parents are continuing to make progress with nit removal. If no progress is observed, there is an increase in the amount of nits, or there are live lice present, the parent will be contacted to repeat the above steps.
- Any student who has evidence of lice 3 times during an occurrence shall not be permitted to attend school unless they are nit free, because this demonstrates a lack of cooperation on the parent's part in lice treatment. (An occurrence is defined as being identified with lice, treated for lice, and being free of lice).
- This policy is in effect so that educational process of the student is not disrupted due to a lice infestation.
- Parents must remember that it is their responsibility to eliminate the lice infestation in their household by treating each person living in the household and addressing all of the steps necessary to rid lice/nits from their home/car/hair.

Additional resources are available:

<http://kidshealth.org/parent/infections/common/lice.html>

<http://www.cdc.gov/lice/head/factsheet.html>

[www.headlice.org](http://www.headlice.org)