

## HEAD LICE

Head lice do not spread disease. Anyone can get head lice. School children get them because they are often in close head-to-head contact. Head lice crawl quickly from one person's head to another and multiply quickly. These tiny flat insects have no wings and cannot jump or fly. Itching and scratching are common signs of head lice, but often there are no symptoms at all. Because other scalp conditions also cause itching, the best way to check for lice is to look for nits (the eggs).

### WHAT DO THEY LOOK LIKE?

Head lice live and breed on the scalp of the head. They are 1-2 mm long and are greyish-brown in colour. They lay eggs next to the scalp. The eggs (called nits) are half the size of a pinhead, oval in shape, white, grey to brown in colour, and hard to see. They are firmly glued to the hair and can't be flicked off like dandruff. The eggs hatch in 7 to 10 days. Nits found more than one (1) cm from the scalp (due to hair growth) have hatched or died. Head lice live off the head only for about 1-2 days and their eggs do not hatch away from the warmth and humidity of the scalp.

### HOW DO YOU GET RID OF THEM?

- Ask your pharmacist about head lice products. You don't need a prescription. *Use products only when lice or nits are present.*
- Follow the product directions exactly. You may repeat the treatment in 24 hours if you still see live lice.
- Rinse the child's hair under a tap (instead of the shower or bathtub) so other parts of the body don't come in contact with the product and to keep the child from swallowing the product or getting it in their eyes.
- Store unused products away from the reach of young children.
- There is no evidence that home remedies such as tea tree oil, mayonnaise, petroleum jelly, olive oil or margarine work. **Never use gasoline or kerosene.**

### TREATMENT PRECAUTIONS

Consult with your doctor or pharmacist regarding treatment:

- Of children under age two
- Of persons with seizure disorders
- For lice in eyebrows, eyelashes or beard
- If the skin on the scalp is broken or infected
- If you are pregnant or breastfeeding and need treatment for lice, before choosing a product consult with your doctor or telephone the Motherisk Program at the Hospital for Sick Children in Toronto at (416) 813-6780. If you're treating others, wear plastic or rubber gloves.

### HOW DO YOU REMOVE THE NITS?

- Patience is a must when trying to remove all the nits. Get a family member or friend to help, if possible.
- Picking all the nits out of the hair is the best way to get rid of head lice. Twice a day is best. Continue to check the head daily for at least 3 weeks even after no nits are visible. Bright, natural light helps you see the nits better.
- Comb the hair to remove tangles then take hold of a small lock of hair. You can comb-out the nits using a special fine-tooth nit comb. Eggs very close to the scalp may need to be removed by hand or tweezers. Use your thumbnail against your first finger to strip the nits from the hair starting from the root right down to the tip. Place nits in a bag. Pin back that lock of hair and continue until all nits are removed. It is important to remove the nits very close to the scalp.
- Please refer to our head lice flow chart for day to day directions. (<http://ckphu.com/school-wellness/>)

## DO I NEED TO WASH OR CLEAN ANYTHING?

After the first treatment, wash any combs, brushes, head gear, clothes, hats, bedding and towels used in the past 3 days in hot water and dry in the dryer on the hot setting for 20 minutes. You can also put items in an air tight plastic bag for 2 weeks. Vacuuming things you cannot wash (Helmets) is a good safeguard for any items that may have come into contact with those who are infested. No extra house cleaning or insecticides are needed. Lice cannot survive longer than 1-2 days away from the head.

## WHAT DO I DO IF SOMEONE IN MY FAMILY HAS HEAD LICE?

- Follow-up and advise all close contacts to be checked to prevent spread and to protect your child from being re-infested.
- If you find head lice, tell anyone in close contact such as other family members, school/daycare/groups, close friends, playmates, neighbours or babysitters.
- Everyone in the house will need to be cleared of head lice at the same time to control the spread. **Treatment products are to be used only on people who have head lice. They will not prevent head lice.**

## POINTS TO REMEMBER

- An untreated source among close contacts is a common reason for reoccurrence.
- Head lice do not live on dogs, cats or other animals, only humans.
- Keeping hair short will not prevent head lice.
- Head lice can exist in all hair types regardless of how long or clean it is.
- Tie back long hair or braid hair to avoid hair to hair contact.



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