

WHAT IS HEAD LICE?



Head lice are small insects about 1/8" long or approximately the size of a sesame seed. They are grayish-brown in color and do **not** have wings. They have 6 legs on the upper body that allow them to crawl very fast. Lice **cannot** jump. They live on the scalp and feed on blood through the skin. They lay eggs called "nits" on hair strands near the scalp. Lice live approximately 30 days and can lay up to six eggs per day. The nits hatch in 7-10 days and the cycle repeats itself.

Who Gets Head Lice and How do They Get it?

Anyone can get head lice! It is not an indication of poor hygiene or housekeeping. No one should be ashamed of having head lice. 3-6 million Americans are affected each year, primarily preschool and school age children. Where ever children get together, such as schools, preschools and day care centers, they are at risk for getting head lice. Lice are spread from person to person by crawling. This can happen by:

- Head to head contact
- Sharing hats, coats or scarves
- Sharing helmets or headphones
- Sharing hair ties, headbands, scrunchies or other hair ornaments
- Sharing combs or brushes
- Contact with infested bedding, towels, toys, pillows or upholstered furniture (including car upholstery)

What to Look For:

Your child may complain of their head itching or you may notice frequent scratching of the head. Check your child's hair under a bright light such as direct sunlight or a fluorescent lamp. Lice are small, move quickly, and are hard to find. Look for teardrop shaped nits attached to the hair shaft near the scalp. A nit may be cream, brown, gray, yellowish or clear. The female louse glues the nits to the hair shaft and they cannot be easily flicked off. Lice lay their eggs in the warm moist areas of the head, such as the back of the neck and around the ears. Look in these areas first, and then check the rest of the scalp and hair. Gloves are not necessary and may hinder the process of looking for bugs and nits.

Treatment:

Head lice can be treated with special lice killing products (pediculocides) applied to the hair. These products are insecticides and must be carefully used only as directed on the package. An alternative treatment for head lice is the oil/Cholesterol method. (SEE TREATMENT DOCUMENT) **Check with your physician before using any treatment if you are pregnant or a child is less than 2 years old.** After treating the head, all the nits must be removed with a nit comb, tweezers or your fingers. Very bright light such as sunlight or fluorescent light and a magnifying glass will make finding them easier. **All lice and nits must be removed,** as treatment products do not kill all the eggs. They will hatch and start a new infestation. Re-treatment may be necessary, and it is *extremely important to NOT use lice treatment products more frequently than recommended on the package.* All household members must be checked and treated only if lice or nits are found.

Lice may crawl off of the head or hair with nits may fall from the head. It is important to clean the environment. Thoroughly vacuum all carpeting, furniture and car interiors. Wash in hot water and dry on hot setting: all recently used clothing, hats, scarves, coats, bedding, pillows, hair ties

and washable stuffed animals. If an item is not washable, place it in a plastic bag, seal tightly and store for 14 days before use.

Lice are easily spread, so it is important to report all cases to the school. Your child must be free of **all lice and nits** before returning to school.

Prevention:

1. For the first 2 weeks after infestation, check your child's hair daily. Then check weekly. (Friday is a good day for checking. Treatment can be provided on the weekend)
2. Teach your child not to share hair care items, hats, helmets, earmuffs or headphones, towels, pillows or bedding.
3. Wash hair frequently and brush thoroughly daily.
4. Keep long hair tied up or pulled back
5. Wash coats and hats frequently
6. Wash brushes and combs frequently.