

Fact Sheet

Head-Lice



What are Head Lice?



Head lice are small, wingless parasitic insects about the size of a sesame seed. Color varies from light to dark tan. They crawl very fast, but cannot jump or fly. They live on hair on the head and feed on blood through the skin of the scalp or neck. Having head lice does not mean an individual has poor personal hygiene and head lice do not spread disease.

How is it Spread?

Anyone can get head lice. Head-to-head contact with an infested person is the most common way to contract head lice. Although rare, lice can be contracted by using personal items such as combs, pillows, hair accessories, or the headwear of an infested person.

Signs and Symptoms

- Head itchiness or frequent scratching
- Tickling feeling as lice move through hair
- Sleeplessness from disrupted sleep as lice are most active at night
- Crawling bugs in the hair and on the scalp
- Nits (lice eggs) fixed to the hair shaft around the ears, forehead, and back of the neck within one-quarter inch of the scalp

Treatment

There are many ways to treat head lice infestations including:

- Manual removal-removing lice and nits with a comb, this will prevent eggs not killed during treatment from hatching
- Pediculicidal treatment- over the counter head lice shampoos, these may require a second treatment, as recommended by product
- Professional treatment- for-cost treatments that use heat to target head lice
- Alternative treatment- the treatments suffocate the lice and nits, but are not licensed or recommended for the treatment of head lice

If the individual with head lice is: pregnant, breastfeeding, has known sensitivities/allergies, is a child under the age of 2 years, or if the infestation is not on the head (e.g. on the eyebrows, eyelashes, pubic hair) check with a healthcare provider before beginning any head lice treatments.

Treatment should ONLY be considered if active lice or viable nits are observed. All household members should be checked at the same time to determine if head lice is present. Vacuum the floor and furniture. Launder personal items in hot water, and dry on high heat for at least 30 minutes.

Prevention

Avoid head-to-head contact with others, and avoid sharing personal items such as combs, brushes, or towels. Help prevent outbreaks by educating children about head lice transmission.



For more sources of information on this topic visit:

ST. CLAIR COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT www.scchealth.co
MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
www.michigan.gov/mdhhs