

Head Lice Information

Head lice can happen to anyone, clean or dirty, rich or poor. The most important fact to remember is that the problem should be quickly treated because delays will only help to spread the infestation throughout the community.

The adult female head louse lays eggs (nits), which she glues to the hair shaft with a tenacious material applied near the root of the hair. The young lice hatch approximately 10 days later and emerge as miniature replicas of the adults. In order to survive, the newborn louse must feed within 24 hours. Under favorable conditions, the head louse will reach maturity in about two weeks. During its 20-30 days of life, the female louse can deposit as many as six eggs per day, so there may be hundreds of nits in a single infestation.

Head lice are usually transmitted from one infested person to another by direct contact with the hair. Personal items like combs, brushes, towels, and bedding are other frequent sources of contamination. Another common source of infestation is clothing, such as hats, ribbons, scarves, topcoats, and sweaters, all of which provide excellent transportation from one individual to another.

Head lice do not observe any class distinction: they can infest anyone and are a problem that is rapidly gaining ground in all parts of our society. The schoolgirl who borrows a comb, the student trying on a hat in a shop, children who share a bed, or the traveler resting his/her head against the back of an airline seat can fall victim to a head louse infestation.

Head lice are insects, flattened in shape from top to bottom; they have no wings and do not jump or fly. Their mouths include a set of six pairs of hooks by which they attach themselves to the hair shaft. They possess short, stout legs equipped with large claws for grasping and holding on to human hair. While they look terrifying when magnified, they actually measure only approximately one-tenth to one-eighth of an inch in length.

Although the lice are difficult to see, they are easy to recognize, provided you are actually looking for them. One telltale sign is a persistent itch of the scalp, often accompanied by infected scratch marks or what appears to be a rash. Closer inspection, possibly aided by a hand lens, will reveal small, silvery eggs attached to individual hairs. In checking the scalp, pay particular attention to the back of the head and the area behind the ears. Lice live mainly in the area at the back of the head, although they will occasionally migrate to the beard or eyebrows.

Lice and their nits can survive (for a time) off the human host. Even though you may have been successful in eliminating your infestation, immediate reinfestation is possible or a fresh infestation of other family members may occur.

If any person in a family, camp, school, or other institution has head lice, there is a strong possibility that others will too. The Warren County R-3 School District has adapted the state recommended "No Nit Policy" to handle the head lice problem. You should watch for persistent itching and check for nits (small silvery eggs that attach to hair shafts) paying particular attention to the neckline and above the ears on a regular basis. Should you discover that your child has head lice **DO NOT SEND THE CHILD TO SCHOOL - KEEP YOUR CHILD HOME UNTIL HE/SHE HAS BEEN TREATED WITH SPECIAL LICE SHAMPOO AND ALL THE NITS HAVE BEEN REMOVED.**

PLEASE BRING YOUR CHILD TO THE NURSE TO BE CHECKED BEFORE RETURNING TO CLASS.

INFORMATION ABOUT TREATMENT OF HEAD LICE

Special lice shampoo must be used. REGULAR SHAMPOO WILL NOT WORK. Shampoo can be obtained from your doctor or pharmacist. Because each lice shampoo is different, follow the directions on the box. Lice Shampoo only kills head lice and will not prevent reinfection.

Shampoo child and any member of the family that has evidence of head lice (Persistent itching, nits on individual hairs or louse on the scalp).

Remove all clothing before treatment and put on clean clothing after shampooing. Nits adhere tightly to the hair shaft. A fine tooth comb may be used to help remove them.

TO PREVENT REINFECTION IT IS IMPORTANT to care for all articles of clothing, bedding, furniture, etc. that may carry a louse or nit.

-Wash clothing, bedding, and towels in hot water (120 degrees or above) and dry on hot cycle. Pillows, blankets and spreads may be put on hot cycle in the dryer for 20 minutes.

-Combs and brushes may be soaked in hot water (just under boiling and kept at that heat) for 20 minutes.

-Furniture, mattresses, carpeting, car seats, etc. should be thoroughly vacuumed and sprayed with special spray for lice.

-Dry clean coats, hats and other clothing that cannot be washed.

-Other articles that cannot be sprayed or taken care of in one of the ways above can be placed in a plastic bag and left for 30 days. Stuffed toys and throw pillows may be handled in this way. NOTE: The louse may not live for that long but the nit may survive for as long as 30 days.

-Hot blow-drying also helps prevent reinfestation.

If you have questions call Laurie Jansen, Daniel Boone Nurse at 636-456-4311 ext. 5359, a toll-free number 1-800-783-1919, or www.headlice.org.