

Head Lice Information Sheet

Having head lice (pediculosis) is common - as many as 6 – 12 million people worldwide get head lice each year.

Head lice is transmitted:

- By **close** head-to-head contact with someone who already has head lice. Contact is common during play at school and at home (**slumber parties, sports activities, at camp, on a playground, etc.**).
- By using hats, scarves, combs, brushes, hair ribbons, pillows or towels recently used by someone with head lice. Storage of these items should be considered (i.e. do not store hats, hooded sweaters, jackets in a pile, encourage separation of these items).

How is Head Lice treated?

- Buy a head lice shampoo or cream rinse from your drug store. Apply the product **following instructions carefully**. **Misuse and overuse could be hazardous**.
- Head lice products kill the head lice and many eggs, but **one treatment may not kill all the eggs**. Therefore, apply a **second treatment** 7 – 10 days after the first treatment to **kill any newly hatched lice** before they mature.
- Check the head for live lice **daily between treatments** and remove any nits that are still present. Use a bright light to help you see. Carefully check all sections of the head and remove all the nits by using fingernails or a nit comb to drag each nit down the hair shaft.
- **It is recommended to remove all nits** as head lice products are **not** 100% effective. **Removal of nits** may minimize the hatching of eggs that were not killed and the spread of young hatched lice to other heads. It is also easier to notice a new infestation if **all nits are removed**.

How can I control the spread of head lice?

- Discourage head-to-head contact and sharing of hats, scarves, hairbrushes and combs.
- Tie long hair back in braids.
- Check the heads of all family members and people in close contact in case someone else has head lice.
 - All family members with head lice should be treated **at the same time**.
 - **Tell all close contacts** of the person with head lice to check their head. As well, tell the child's teacher and/or daycare worker.
 - Check young school age children **weekly** for head lice; more often if there is an outbreak.

Are items to be bagged for 2 weeks?

- Head lice survive less than **one or two days** if they fall off the scalp and **cannot feed**. Head lice eggs (nits) cannot hatch and usually die within a week **if they do not remain under ideal conditions of heat and humidity similar to those found close to the human scalp**. Therefore, because a nit must incubate under conditions equivalent to those found near the human scalp, it is very **unlikely to hatch away from the head**. In addition, if the egg were to hatch, the newly emerged nymph would die within several hours if it did not feed on human blood.

Will laundering kill head lice?

- Washing, soaking, or drying items at a temperature greater than 130°F can kill both head lice and nits. Dry cleaning also kills head lice and nits.
- Only items that have been in contact with the **head** of the infested person in the 48 hours before treatment should be considered for cleaning.

What about other treatments aside from the insecticidal shampoo?

- Some people use home remedies such as mayonnaise, petroleum jelly, olive oil, vinegar or tea tree oil. There is **no evidence** that these products work to treat head lice.

Do head lice spread disease?

- Head lice should **not be** considered as a medical or public health hazard. Head lice are **not known to spread disease**. Head lice can be **an annoyance** because their presence may cause itching and loss of sleep. Sometimes the itching can lead to excessive scratching that can sometimes increase the chance of a secondary skin infection.

Do I need to clean my house?

- You must wash hats, scarves, hairbrushes, combs, or any other item that is worn or used on the head, as well as pillowcases, towels and bed linens after the first and second treatment in very hot soapy water. Items that cannot be machine-washed should be dry cleaned or placed in an airtight bag for 10 days to two weeks. **Excessive house cleaning is not necessary**, but it may be advisable to vacuum surfaces where heads have rested (e.g. sofas, seats of cars and helmets). **NEVER** use insecticide sprays.

Important points to remember

1. Be sensitive to your child's feelings! 2. Lack of cleanliness does not cause head lice. 3. Both children and adults can get head lice. 4. Short hair does not prevent the spread of lice. 5. Head lice do not live on dogs, cats or other animals.