

Head Lice (Pediculosis capitis) Fact Sheet

Here are some facts concerning head lice. To prevent an outbreak, we need everyone's cooperation. Head lice are not a sign of unclean people or homes, but can be a nuisance. They are usually found when head to head contact occurs. If you noticed your child scratching their head, or if you find lice or nits, please contact your school nurse.

Precautions

1. Check your child's hair for eggs (also called nits).
2. If you suspect your child has head lice, ask your health care provider to diagnose the problem and recommend appropriate treatment.
3. Tell your school nurse if your child is diagnosed as having head lice.
4. If head lice is diagnosed, do not return your child to school until she or he has been treated.

Information about head lice:

What are they? Head lice are tiny wingless insects that live only on a person's scalp and hair. They hatch from small eggs (nits) that are firmly attached to the individual hairs near the scalp and cannot be easily moved up or down the hair (as can specks of dandruff). They look like grains of sand. Nits may be found throughout the hair but are most often located at the back of the scalp, behind the ears and on top of the head. The eggs hatch in 6-10 days, with new lice reaching adulthood about 2-3 weeks later. The lice live by biting and sucking blood from the scalp. Lice can survive 1-2 days away from the scalp. Until a person with head lice is treated, they can transmit them to others.

How should you check for head lice? You probably will not see the lice, only the eggs. These are tiny, pearl-gray, oval-shaped specks attached to the hair near the scalp. Look carefully, using a magnifying glass and natural light. Search for nits at the back of the neck, behind the ears, and at the top of the head.

How does a person get head lice? Anyone who has close contact or shares personal items with an infested person can become infested. Lice are spread by crawling from person-to-person directly or onto shared personal items, such as combs, brushes, head coverings, clothing, bedding, or towels.

What should you do if your child has head lice? If your child does have head lice, everyone in your family should be checked, and anyone with nits should definitely be treated.

To eliminate head lice:

1. Use a medicine that your health care provider prescribes or recommends. Use any of these products very carefully, and consult a physician before treating children less than 2 years of age, pregnant or nursing women, or people with extensive cuts or scratches on the head or neck.
2. After appropriate treatment, removal of nits is very important, but can be a difficult and time-consuming process because nits have such a firm grip on the hair. You can remove most of them with a special, fine-toothed comb. Others may require individual removal manually with your fingers. While removal of nits is not necessary to prevent spread, your school may require it to lessen confusion about whether your child is still infested. It is sometimes hard to tell if nits are alive or dead.
3. Check for nits daily for the next 10-14 days. Most treatments recommend a re-application of the treatment 7-10 days later.
4. Clean personal items and surroundings:
 - Machine-wash all washable and possibly infested items in hot water. Dry them in a hot dryer.
 - Put non-washable items (furry toys or pillows) in a hot dryer for 20 minutes or dry-clean them.
 - Seal items that cannot be washed or dried in a plastic bag for 10 days. Any nits or lice present will die.
 - Wash combs/brushes in a shampoo approved to kill lice, or soak in hot water for at least 5 minutes.
 - Thoroughly vacuum rugs, upholstered furniture, mattresses and cars.
 - Do not use insecticide sprays because they can be harmful to people and animals.

When can your child return? If your child was diagnosed with head lice, he or she can come back as soon as the shampoo has been used, you have removed as many nits as possible from your child's hair, and you have cleaned or stored personal items. A parent or guardian must accompany the student to school the next day to be examined by the school nurse. Remember that you must keep checking your child's hair for new nits for at least 2 weeks. If your nurse sees that the condition is getting worse, you may be called to come pick up your child.

Please contact your school nurse should you have any questions or concerns or refer to the following website: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: www.cdc.gov/lice.