



## HEAD LICE

Head lice are wingless insects that live on the human scalp - especially the scalps of young children. They do not carry disease, but they can be unsightly, itchy, and upsetting. Getting lice can happen to any child, and is not a reason for panic or embarrassment. When teachers or school nurses find signs of lice or lice eggs, they usually send a child home with instructions not to return until signs of the infestation are gone. If this should happen to your child, you will naturally be concerned. We hope that this guide will help you sort fact from fiction.

### The lore of lice

Few childhood ailments have accumulated as much lore as lice infestation, some of it true and much of it fantasy. Here are the facts:

- Lice infestation is not rare. 6-12 million persons in the US get lice every year. Most of them are school children.
- Children do not get head lice because they are dirty, neglected, or poor, and meticulous hygiene will not prevent an infestation. Lice are transmitted by sharing brushes, clothing (hats), and direct head-to-head contact with other children who have lice.
- Removing the nits from the hair of children with thick or long hair requires extra patience and perseverance - the origin of the term "nit picking!"
- Lice find clinging to round hair shafts easier than clinging to oval shafts.
- Lice have no wings to fly and they don't hop, but they do scurry rapidly!
- Many nits (eggs) can be deposited by only one louse.
- Insecticide sprays to house and furniture is not a necessary part of treatment for lice. Simply placing stuffed animals and other non-washable items in the dryer on high heat for 20 minutes will kill the existing lice.

### Signs and symptoms - checking for lice

Lice are the size of a sesame seed and are black or reddish-brown. They scurry along the scalp to hide when you part the hair to look for them. "Eggs" (grayish color-contain the larvae of the louse before it hatches) and "nits" (more white color-empty egg cases) - are small gray/white objects attached to the shafts of hair. The further they are along the hair shaft, the longer the time that has passed since the egg was laid. They are the size of a small fleck of "dandruff" but remain stuck to the hair shaft unless forcibly removed, unlike dandruff which is easily removed. Itchy scalp, redness or swelling on the scalp, or swollen lymph nodes in the neck may also occur. In order for your child to be cured, all eggs and nits must be removed because it is very difficult to tell the difference between them. Should one egg hatch, the resulting louse can lay up to 1000 more eggs.

### Treating lice

1. Many lice shampoos and cream rinses are available over the counter and as prescription medications. Remember that they are insecticides and do not use them more than 2 times per year. Do not treat other family members unless you see nits, eggs, or lice. Apply your treatment of choice to **dry hair**. Saturate the hair completely and massage the shampoo into the scalp. Wait 20-30 minutes, and then add water, form lather, shampoo, and rinse thoroughly. To soften the egg cases and make them easier to remove from the hair shaft, a rinse with white vinegar (do not dilute) which is left on the hair for one hour and then washed out is very helpful. You may use a regular shampoo and conditioner after the treatment to get the tangles out. You may repeat the treatment once 7-12 days later.
2. Remove the nits. This is the most important treatment. It is best done with fingernails and a metal lice comb. It can be very tedious so allow plenty of time. **For effective treatment all nits must be removed.** Placing the nits on a moist paper towel when you remove them helps contain them as well as makes them easier to see. Then dispose of the towel in a plastic bag and seal it. Check the scalp 24-48 hours later to be sure no nits remain. If you find nits, remove them and continue to check every 24 hours for nits and remove them until you no longer find nits or egg cases.
3. If you do not wish to use a pediculocide shampoo, you may remove the nits and treat the scalp and hair by saturating it with olive oil, leaving it on overnight (wrap head in a towel) and washing out with regular shampoo/conditioner the next morning. Repeat this every 4 days for one month. This treatment is tedious but works and does wonders for hair and scalp!

Note: If itching continues even after the lice are gone, call us. The itching is most likely an allergic response to the dead lice and eggs and not a new infestation. We may be able to prescribe medication that will help.