

Head Lice

Head lice are a common problem for children in child care setting and schools. Anyone can get head lice – they are not a sign of being dirty. Hair length does not influence infestation either. There are two other kinds of lice that infest people, but they do not live on the head.

Head lice are very small, tan-colored insects which live on human heads. They lay eggs (nits) close to the scalp. The eggs are tiny (about the eye of a small needle) and are gray or white in color.

We encourage you to check your children regularly for head lice. If you find lice or eggs, follow the suggested treatment and prevention plan provided below or as prescribed by the doctor.

CAUSE: *Pediculus humanus capitis*, a louse

SYMPTOMS: Itching of the scalp and neck. Look for

1. Crawling lice in the hair, usually few in number
2. Eggs (nits) glued to the hair, often found behind the ears and at the back of the neck
3. Scratch marks on the scalp or back of the neck at the hairline.

TRANSMISSION: Lice are spread by direct person to person contact and by sharing person items such as combs, brushes, hats, scarves, jackets, sheets, and pillowcases. Lice do not jump or fly; they crawl and can fall off the head. Head lice do not live longer than 48 hours off the head. They only lay their eggs while on the head. Lice do not spread to or from pets.

CONTAGIOUS PERIOD: Until treated with a lice-killing medication. Crawling forms of the louse or communicable, the nits are not.



Until first treatment is completed, and no LIVE lice are seen. If the child has repeated re-infestation (three documented exclusions), it is recommended that the child be free of nits before readmission.

Prevention & Control

1. Avoid sharing hair care items, towels, bedding, clothing, hats, and headgear (such as sports helmets).
2. Hang clothing in individual lockers or on assigned coat hooks.

3. All contaminated combs, brushes, and similar items must be disinfected by:
 - a. Soaking in medicated shampoo for 10 minutes, or
 - b. Soaking in 2% Lysol for 1 hour, or
 - c. Heating in water of at least 130°F for 10 minutes.
4. Clean floors, furniture, mattresses, and carpeting by thorough vacuuming.
The use of insecticide sprays is not recommended.
5. Recently worn clothing, bedding, and towels should be washing in hot water and dried in a hot dryer for at least 20 minutes before being used again. Clothing, linens, and stuffed toys that are unable to be washed can be sealed in plastic bags for 2 weeks.
6. Check your child's head frequently throughout the year. If one person is a family, child care, school, etc., has head lice, other should be checked too. Only those who have head lice should be treated.
7. Treatment
 - a. Use a lice-killing shampoo, lotion or crème rinse obtained either over the counter at the drugstore or by prescription from your physician.
 - b. Follow the directions carefully. Directions may vary, depending on the type of product being used. If live lice are seen after treatment, it may be necessary to use a different brand.
 - c. For some medications, a second treatment is recommended 7 to 10 days later to kill any nits that may have survived the first treatment. If you use a prescription medication, discuss this with your physician. More than 2 treatment are unnecessary and could be harmful.
 - d. The removal of nits may be facilitated by
 - i. Combing with a fine-toothed nit comb designed for this purpose.
 - ii. Soaking the hair with white vinegar (3% to 5% acetic acid) and then applying a damp towel soaked in the same solution for 30 to 60 minutes.
 - iii. Applying enzymatic nit remover.



Vinegar and commercial enzymatic nit remover should be used according to manufacturer's recommendation to assure that the residual activity of the lice-killing medication is not affected.

8. To assure effective treatment, check previously treated children for any evidence or signs of new infestation daily for 10 days after treatment. Repeat treatment may be necessary.

For more information, you or your physician may call the Central District Health Department at 385-5175, or your local health department.