

# What to do if your child comes home with head lice...

Don't panic! Anyone — adult *or* youngster — can get head lice. Millions of school children contract head lice each year. Head lice are passed from person to person by direct contact or on shared objects (hats, clothing, scarves, brushes, combs, pillows, headphones, etc.) that have come in contact with their heads, necks, or shoulders. *It has nothing to do with cleanliness and does not reflect poorly on you as a parent.* Head lice can be easily and effectively treated. By following the advice below, you can more effectively detect, treat, and prevent head lice in a family member.

## What are head lice?



Magnified illustration of a louse.



Magnified illustration of an egg.

Head lice are tiny crawling bugs the size of a sesame seed and are usually light brown in color. Lice are very small and hard to see but with a good light or a magnifying glass you can see them. Nits (lice eggs) are tiny and light in color, the size of a poppy seed, and are attached to the hair shaft, very close to the scalp, by a type of insect super glue. Nits are found anywhere on the hairs of the head but are mainly found behind the ears and on the top and back of the head and neck. The nits may look like hair shafts and cannot be removed easily.

dandruff, but are cemented to the

## How long do the bugs live? The life of a louse...

The female louse will live on a person for 20-30 days and can live off the head at room temperature for 1-2 days. The adult louse can lay as many as 300 eggs in her lifetime, which hatch in 7-10 days.

## How is it spread?

Head lice **CANNOT** jump or fly. They are spread by head to head contact **or** by sharing things such as...

- Personal care items, combs, brushes, head bands, scarves, ribbons, hair ties, hats, bandanas, or helmets.
- Towels, linens, pillows, or nap time blankets.
- Costumes and clothes for pretend play.
- Stuffed and cloth toys.
- Lockers or hanging clothes together on coat hooks.

## What are the symptoms?

- Itching on the head caused by the bite of the louse.
- Persistent scratching or scratch marks that may look like a rash.
- There may be no symptoms at all.

## Who gets head lice?

Contrary to popular belief, the presence of **head lice is not a sign of unclean people or homes.** Head lice will set up residence with a person of any age or gender. Anyone who has close contact with an infested person, or shares personal items can become infested. Frequent bathing or shampooing will **NOT** prevent lice or eliminate them once they are established.

## Can lice be prevented?

Avoid sharing personal and other items as stated above. **Teach children** how to avoid spreading lice. **DO NOT SHARE** beds and personal items at home if at all possible during the infestation period. **Check your child DAILY for nits and lice** if there is lice at school or if friends have had them.

## What about treatment?

Treatment is directed at **getting rid of the lice from both the infested person and from his/her surroundings and personal items.** All household members and persons with close physical contact with the infested person should be examined for lice and treated if infested.

### How to get started...

There are **THREE** steps that **MUST** be done at the same time:

1. Personal hygiene
2. Household maintenance
3. Getting rid of the nits

### **\*\*\*DAY ONE\*\*\***

#### **1. Personal Hygiene:**

- A variety of head lice killing treatments are available over-the-counter (OTC) from your pharmacy. OTC products come in various forms, such as shampoo, cream rinse, gel and no-drip mousse. Most products are applied to **DRY** hair. Wetting the hair can dilute the treatment. Read and follow all the instructions on the product carefully. **\*ALL OF THESE TYPES OF PRODUCTS MUST BE USED AS DIRECTED\***
- Use a clean towel but leave hair wet for nit removal.

#### **2. Household Maintenance:**

- Wash bedding, linens, stuffed toys and recently worn garments.
- Machine dry on a hot setting.
- Vacuum rugs, furniture, mattresses, cars, etc.
- Dry clean unwashable items **OR** put in a **sealed, plastic bag for at least 2 weeks, in a freezer for 48 hours, OR in a hot dryer for 30 minutes.**
- Boil all combs and brushes in water for 10 minutes or treat with pediculicide shampoo.
- Lice sprays are **NOT** recommended and can be harmful to people and animals.

#### **3. Getting rid of the nits... The most important step to follow!**

- Use good lighting. While still wet, comb hair completely and divide into small sections.
- Remove lice and nits (eggs) with a fine tooth comb, usually provided with shampoo.

### **\*\*\*DAY TWO THROUGH SEVEN\*\*\***

- Vacuum furniture and floors **DAILY**.
- Recheck the head of each effected person at least **DAILY**. If lice or nits are found, remove them, clean your living space again and check with your health provider before reusing the head lice medication.
- After seven days, repeat shampoo or treatment.

### **\*\*\*NEXT TWO TO FOUR WEEKS\*\*\***

*~~Keep checking head DAILY for lice and nits~~*

#### **DO:**

- ◆ **Consult a physician before treating...**
  - a) infants or children under the age of 2 years.
  - b) pregnant or nursing women.
  - c) anyone with extensive cuts or scratches on the head or neck.
  - d) if a lice product has been used within the past 7 days. *Although these products will kill lice, none will kill 100% of the nits.*

#### **DO NOT:**

- ◆ Use kerosene, gasoline, or animal pesticides.
- ◆ Use lice products more often than recommended.
- ◆ Fumigate (the use of flea bombs or commercial sprays). It is not effective and can cause serious health problems.
- ◆ Shave heads.
- ◆ Treat pets.
- ◆ Use Lindane® or Kwell® unless under the direction of a physician, because of its potential toxicity.