

Parent Information- Pediculosis (Head Lice)

What are head lice?

Head lice are tiny insects 1/8" long that live on the human head. Color varies from light to dark tan. They do not jump or fly, but crawl from hair to hair and feed on blood from scalp bites.

What is a nit?

Nits are the tiny, smooth, plump, teardrop shaped eggs of lice. Unlike dandruff and other matter they are strongly glued to the hair shaft, often close to the scalp. Nits are usually grayish-white but color may vary depending on the color of the person's hair. Nits can be found anywhere on the head, often around the ears and back of the neck. Nits hatch in 7-10 days.

Do they cause diseases?

No. Head lice do not spread illness. However, they can cause severe itching. Skin infections may occur from scratching.

How do you get head lice?

Anyone can get head lice, rich or poor, clean or dirty. Head lice can be passed from one person to another in a number of ways.

1. Head to head contact.
2. Sharing personal items like combs, brushes, towels, bedding.
3. Sharing clothing such as hats, coats, scarves, ribbons, and hair decorations.
4. Placing heads on furniture, rugs, car seats, recently used by someone with lice.
5. Piling coats, hats, scarves on top of each other.

What are the signs to look for?

1. Itching of the head, especially around the ears and back of the neck.
2. Nits. Small white specks in the hair such as dandruff can be confused with nits. These things can be easily removed, while nits are glued strongly to the hair.
3. Adult lice are often never seen.

Is shampooing with lice shampoo enough?

No! Treatment is not complete without immediate proper care of these items:

1. Clothing- Heat kills lice and nits. Machine wash, with very hot tap water, all washable clothing and bedding used within the past 10 days. This includes hats, jackets, scarves and stuffed toys.
2. Items not washable should be dry-cleaned or stored in tightly sealed plastic bags for at least 14 days.
3. Combs, brushes, curler and hair ornaments should be washed in lice shampoo, or soaked in 2% Lysol solution for 1 hour, or soaked for 5-10 minutes in a pan of hot water heated to 150 degrees.
4. Upholstered furniture, pillows, mattresses, carpeting, cloth car seats, should be vacuumed thoroughly.

All of these things must be done immediately after the first shampooing and again if the second shampoo is part of the prescribed treatment.

Can head lice be prevented?

Measures can be taken to lessen the risk of getting head lice.

1. Items such as combs, brushes, hats, scarves, and clothing that have contact with the head should not be shared.
2. Headgear should be placed in sleeves or pockets of coats and jackets when not being worn.
3. To prevent spread if lice is found:
 - All family members need to be checked
 - Notify school, and parents of children's playmates
4. Shampooing with head lice shampoo will NOT prevent someone from getting head lice.

What should you do if head lice are suspected?

1. Purchase a Non-prescription head lice shampoo from a drug store and follow directions carefully.
2. Remove all nits from the hair. Removed nits should be placed directly in a plastic or paper bag and then in a trash container.
3. Check family members daily for 10 days, and treat if lice or nits are found.

Source: <http://www.birmingham.k12.mi.us/schools/elementary/pierce>