

HEAD LICE (Pediculosis)

Head lice are very common among school-aged children. Transmission can occur at school, but just as easily can occur outside of school.

What are head lice? Head lice are tiny insects that live on the human head (scalp and hair). Lice hatch from tiny eggs (nits) that are firmly attached to the hair shaft. Nits are most often located near the back of the neck and behind the ears. The eggs hatch in 6 to 10 days, with new lice reaching adulthood 2 to 3 weeks later. Each adult female louse will lay 6 to 8 eggs per day and will live for 30 days.

How does one check for lice? You might not see the insects because they like to hide. The eggs (nits) are tiny, pearl-gray in color, and oval-shaped. A magnifying glass and natural light are helpful tools when searching for nits.

What should you do if your child has head lice? If your child has head lice, everyone in the family should be examined. To get rid of lice you will need to use a medication prescribed or recommended by your healthcare provider. Consult your pediatrician or primary care provider before treating children less than two years of age, pregnant or nursing women, or people with extensive cuts or scratches on the head or neck. Most medications require a second application 7 to 10 days after the first application.

Here are some things you might not realize about lice. Head lice:

- Are parasites which feed on blood from human scalps (not pets or animals);
- Have been around for millennia;
- Transfer by crawling from head to head;
- Prefer clean hair because it is easier to attach;
- Infest most families at least once;
- Spread primarily through head-to-head contact among children;
- Can be eradicated with proper treatment;
- *Do not* jump or fly (they move *only* by crawling);
- *Do not* spread disease;
- *Do not* burrow or infest homes, bedding, furniture, carpet, etc.;
- *Do not* discriminate based on socioeconomic factors.

A new complaint of an itchy scalp is often the first sign of head lice, however most children are without symptoms for the first four to six weeks of an infestation. While head lice can be time-consuming and a nuisance, it is important to remember that lice are not dangerous.