

Head Lice



Communicable Disease Division
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Date:

Dear Parent or Guardian:

Your child may have recently been exposed to **lice**. Lice are small, tan-colored insects about the size of a sesame seed that lay tiny, gray/white eggs (nits) in the hair. Lice do not cause or spread disease. Head lice can occur to anyone and do not represent poor hygiene.

What are the symptoms of lice?

Symptoms include itching and scratching on the scalp, behind and around ears, and neck. Nits may be glued to the hair shaft about 3 to 4 mm from the scalp. Sometimes the lice can be seen or felt moving in the hair.

How are lice spread?

Lice are most commonly spread by direct contact with the of a person infested with lice. Lice can only spread by crawling; they do not fly or jump. They can spread when a person with lice shares items such as combs, brushes, hair accessories, hats, blankets, or pillows with another person. Lice can live only 1 to 2 days away from the scalp.

How is lice diagnosed and treated?

By carefully inspecting hair with a bright light and a magnifying glass, lice and nits can be identified. There are a variety of treatments for lice. Pesticides that kill lice and most nits are available. These products are available in drug and grocery stores. It is extremely important to follow the package directions and not overuse these chemicals. Suggested remedies using household products, like salad oils, mayonnaise, and Vaseline, are not effective. **It is most important to comb the hair with a special nit comb to remove lice and nits daily for 2–3 weeks.**

How do you control the spread?

- Linens exposed to lice or nits should be machine washed and dried using the hottest setting. This kills lice in bedding and clothing.
- Dry cleaning clothing and bedding is also effective.
- Seal other fabrics, toys and upholstered furniture that cannot be machine washed in a plastic bag for at least 10 days.
- Vacuum floors, carpets, mattresses and furniture.
- Do not share hats, combs, pillows or other personal items.
- Students do not need to be excluded from school.
- Students can be in school as long as appropriate treatment has begun and can stay in school as long as treatment continues.

How do I get more information?

For more information about lice, contact your healthcare provider.