

10 MYTHS ABOUT HEAD LICE

The most common misconceptions about head lice and the real facts behind them

<http://childparenting.about.com/od/healthsafety/a/Top-10-Myths-About-Head-Lice.htm>

As common as head lice are, there is an abundance of persistent misunderstandings about them. (Many of these myths are as persistent as the lice themselves!) Here are some common myths about head lice and the facts behind the misconceptions.

1. Lice can jump.

Lice do not have wings. They cannot fly and they cannot jump. Instead, they move by crawling. That is why direct head-to-head contact, such as kids putting their heads together while playing, is the most common way for head lice to spread from one person to another.

2. You are more likely to get head lice if your hair is dirty, you have bad personal hygiene habits or if your home is untidy.

Getting head lice has absolutely nothing to do with personal hygiene or the cleanliness of a home. And washing your hair will not get rid of lice, which cling to hair follicles, nor nits (lice eggs), which are extremely sticky and cling to hair.

3. An itchy head means your child most likely has head lice.

Itchy scalp is one of the common symptoms of head lice. But there can be other causes of itchy scalp, such as seborrheic dermatitis (dandruff) or dry skin. Moreover, some children who have head lice may not experience itching.

4. Head lice prefer long hair.

Lice do not care whether hair is short, long, clean or dirty. Lice thrive in hair, period, specifically on the blood they get through the scalp.

5. You can get head lice from pets (and vice versa).

Lice cannot be transmitted from pets, and pets cannot get them from people.

6. Head lice carry and transmit diseases.

The good news is that lice have not been shown to spread disease. That said, they can be extremely bothersome. Children who have head lice can experience intense itching and develop a rash from the bites, and the skin can become infected from scratching. They can feel irritable and have trouble sleeping because they are itchy. And of course, lice can be emotionally upsetting for a child and for her/his family.

7. To kill the lice, you must stuff all your child's belongings in plastic bags, and put them in a freezer or leave them in the bags for several weeks.

This used to be the recommendation years ago, but it is understood today that lice do not survive very long away from a host. The best way to handle a lice infestation in your environment is to simply vacuum any items and areas you think your child may have rested her/his head on, wash her/his linens and towels with hot water and put them in a hot dryer to kill any lice or nits.

8 Kids are most likely to get head lice in school.

This is a common misconception, probably stemming from the fact that school-age children are at an increased risk for getting head lice. The fact is, kids tend to get head lice from places and activities where they are more likely to have direct head-to-head contact or share personal items, such as combs, bedding, towels and hair accessories. The most common sources of head lice infestations are, in addition to school, camp, daycare, slumber parties and sports activities, among others.

9 Head lice are extremely contagious and children who are diagnosed with head lice should be isolated until all the nits are gone.

The truth is that lice are most frequently spread through head-to-head contact, which allows the lice to travel from one person to another. Since they cannot jump from one person to another, transmission can be prevented by taking such precautions as not sharing personal items and avoiding close contact. Isolation of a child who has head lice, or keeping her/him out of school, as long as she/he has begun treatment, is not necessary.

In fact, the American Academy of Pediatrics and the National Association of School Nurses have recommended that schools revise so-called "no-nit" policies, which require children to be kept out of school until they are completely free of nits and lice. Doctors today are advising that children be allowed to return to school once they have begun treatment to eradicate lice.

10 Natural alternative treatments for head lice are always safe and effective for kids.

The truth is that parents must be cautious when using products that are touted as being "natural" to treat their child's head lice. Many products are not approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, and may contain ingredients such as certain essential oils that are not recommended for use on young children. Always check with your doctor before using any products on your child's scalp. And keep in mind that no product, natural or not, is 100% effective in killing lice and nits.