

HEAD LICE

Let's face it – talking about head lice makes us all groan. Although lice are “icky,” they do not cause disease and are not dangerous to the child or others.

WHAT ARE HEAD LICE? Head lice are tiny parasitic insects that infest human hair, feeding on the host's scalp. They lay their eggs, also called “nits”, on hair shafts about 1/8” above the scalp. **While lice do not carry disease, they are contagious through contact.** Head-to-head contact is the most common way to get lice. Head-to-head contact can occur during play anywhere including during activities such as sports, on the playground, slumber parties, and at camps. They can also be spread by shared brushes, combs, hats, scarves, etc. Head lice are fairly common among school aged children. A case of head lice does not mean the infested person has poor hygiene. Lice infest both clean and dirty heads alike.

HOW CAN I TELL IF MY CHILD HAS HEAD LICE?

The main symptom of lice is an “itchy” scalp but not always. Close examination of the hair and scalp is necessary to determine if head lice are present. Adult head lice are about the size of a sesame seed, 2-3mm long, and are pale and gray, although color may vary. Live lice can be hard to spot as they move quickly and avoid light.

The eggs and their shell casings are called “nits” and are small ovals, about 0.8mmx0.3mm.

They are usually yellow to white and are attached to the hair shaft with a sticky substance that holds them in place. After the eggs hatch, the nits remain attached to the hair shaft.

IF LICE OR NITS ARE FOUND:

1. **Treat heads** with a lice and egg-killing solution – contact your doctor or pharmacist for a recommendation. Check product recommendations for a second application.
2. **Remove any remaining eggs with a fine tooth comb.** Combing should be done daily for at least two weeks following the discovery of lice or eggs.
3. **Kill any remaining lice in your home.** All exposed clothing and linens must be washed in HOT water and a HOT dryer. This includes pillows, blankets, bedspreads, stuffed animals, etc. Vacuum all carpets and upholstered surfaces. Any non-washable items should be tightly sealed in a plastic bag for at least 14 days.
4. Examine every head in your home very carefully for any sign of nits and/or lice.
5. Tell your children to avoid head-to-head contact and sharing of combs, hats, barrettes or other personal items commonly worn on the head.
6. Please contact the school nurse if you find lice or nits on your child's head.

Additional information about head lice can be found on the CDC's website:

<http://www.cdc.gov/parasites/lice/head/parents.html>