HEALTH-FACTS

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Head Lice

Head lice infestation is a common problem among people. Although it is annoying, the condition does not transmit any disease.

What are Head Lice?

- Very small (less than 1/8 inch long) insects (parasites) without wings that live on the human head
- Eggs (nits) are laid on hair shaft close to scalp (within ¼ inch of the scalp).
- Nits can be gray, white or brown and are firmly attached to hair shaft with glue-like substance.
- Nits hatch in 6-10 days.
- Head lice cannot fly or jump—they only crawl.
- Head lice cannot live off a head longer than 48 hours.

Who gets Head Lice?

- **ANYONE**
- *Pets <u>cannot</u> get or carry Head Lice.*

What are the Symptoms?

- Itching and scratching of the scalp and neck
- Feels like something "crawling" in hair
- May have sores from constant scratching
- May see lice
- Nits attached to hair shaft

How are Head Lice Spread?

- Direct head contact with an infested person
- Sharing personal items (combs, brushes, other hair-care items, towels, pillowcases)
- Sharing clothing, headgear, and other head coverings.

<u>Guidelines for What to Do if Someone Gets Head Lice</u>

1) *IF TREATING WITH OVER-THE-COUNTER LICE-KILLING PRODUCTS*

- Many products are on the market, such as medicated shampoos and lotions containing pyrethrin or permethrin.
- These products only kill the lice, not the eggs/nits.
- Follow the package directions for using these products; *<u>directions can be different from product to product</u>*.

***Note:* DO NOT use a regular conditioner or shampoo/conditioner combination before using lice treatment. Do not rewash the hair for 1-2 days after the lice product is used.**

- It can take several hours for the lice to die after the treatment.
- Contact your health care provider with questions.

CAUTION: *Follow product directions about retreatment (7-10 days later); do not retreat sooner or more often than recommended.*

2) *IF TREATING WITH A PRESCRIPTION PRODUCT, FOLLOW YOUR HEALTH CARE PROVIDERS INSTRUCTIONS.*

3) *HAIR COMBING AND NIT REMOVAL AFTER TREATMENT*

- Separate hair into small sections to comb. Gently comb hair with a special nit-removal comb.
- Depending on how thick and long hair is, it may take 1-2 hours to comb.
- Wash towels used and clothing worn during nit combing.
- Follow 14-Day Lice Treatment Plan.

4) *CHECK OTHER MEMBERS OF THE HOUSE-HOLD FOR LICE*

- Look for nits firmly attached to hair shafts, near the scalp, especially at the neck hairline and behind the ears.
- You may see nits more easily than lice because lice move so fast.

CAUTION: *Only members of the household with live lice or nits on the hair shafts less than ¼ inch from the scalp should be treated.*

5) *CHILD AND SCHOOL ATTENDANCE*

- After treatment has been given, the child can return to school.
- Please call your school health office or your health care provider with any questions.

OVER →

6*) ENVIRONMENTAL CLEANUP (to be done same day as treatment)*

- Clean combs, brushes and similar items by*:*
  - Soaking in the medicated shampoo for 10 minutes, or
  - Heating in water of at least 130°F for 10 minutes.
- Clean floors, carpeting and furniture by thorough vacuuming.
- Wash and dry pillowcases, sheets, blankets, towels, stuffed animals and clothes worn last three days. Use HOT water; then dry on HIGH heat.
- If above items cannot be washed/ dried or dry cleaned, then seal in an airtight double plastic bag for two weeks.
- The use of insecticide sprays is NOT recommended.

CAUTION: *Do not use any of the items until they have been thoroughly cleaned.*

ALTERNATIVE HEAD LICE STRATEGIES

Suffocant Treatment, when applied, treatment may suffocate and/or create environment unfavorable to the head lice: *The Minnesota Department of Health cannot recommend these methods without scientific evidence of their effectiveness.* However some individuals have found this to be effective.

- Mayonnaise
- Oil (e.g. vegetable, olive, mineral)
- Petroleum Jelly (Vaseline)

Apply suffocant to generously to hair, hair and scalp must be saturated. Cover hair with close-fitting shower cap, leave cap on for eight hours (exact time needed to kill lice unknown). *Caution: Avoid treatment when infested person sleeps, it can be a suffocation hazard.* Remove cap and wash hair with shampoo to remove suffocant. Remove nits and any live lice.

ADDITIONAL METHODS OF NIT REMOVAL

People have also used several alternative methods to assist with nit removal (loosen nits, make louse combing easier). Similar to suffocant treatments, *the Minnesota Department of Health cannot recommend these methods without scientific evidence of their effectiveness.* However many people claim that the following methods help to remove nits:

- Vinegar and water (one-to-one mixture) is commonly used to help remove nits. Hair is soaked with the mixture for 30-60 minutes. Rinse the hair following removal of nits.
- Over-the-counter products, which are applied to the hair to assist with nit removal, are available. Ask your pharmacist or primary care provider about these.

PREVENTION

Parents should be encouraged to check their children's heads for lice on a regular basis throughout the year. Families should not depend on someone else to check a child's head, as this may delay treatment Treating persons without lice or nits will unnecessarily expose them to potentially harmful chemicals.