

Head Lice (Pediculosis)

WHAT ARE HEAD LICE?

- ✓ Lice are tiny insects that live on the scalp and crawl through the hair.
- ✓ Lice need human blood to live, and die within 24 hours if they cannot feed.
- ✓ Lice lay eggs (nits) that cling to the hair close to the scalp. Nits are oval shaped and most often can be seen in the hair behind the ears or near the neck.
- ✓ Lice hatch from nits after about 6 days, and can lay more eggs after 10 days.
- ✓ Head lice are not a sign of uncleanliness, and they don't spread disease.

SYMPTOMS

- ✓ Scalp itching is the most common symptom.

HOW ARE HEAD LICE SPREAD?

- ✓ Head lice are usually spread by head-to-head contact.
- ✓ Less often, lice can be spread by sharing clothing, combs, brushes, bedding, or sharing storage compartments (like lockers) with someone who has lice.

HOW ARE HEAD LICE TREATED?

- ✓ The American Academy of Pediatrics says the treatment of choice is permethrin 1% creme rinse (such as Nix®). It is available without a prescription. Follow the instructions on the package carefully.
- ✓ Permethrin creme rinse kills live lice, but not all of their eggs. You may need to apply it again after 7-10 days to treat the lice that hatch from the surviving eggs. Some experts recommend doing this even if you don't see live lice.
- ✓ Many alternative "chemical free" treatments are available, but there is not much scientific information on how well they work. Some might interfere with permethrin treatment.
- ✓ No treatment works 100% of the time. If you have questions or if treatment doesn't work, contact your health care provider.

WHAT ELSE DO I NEED TO DO?

- ✓ Combing out nits after treatment with permethrin or other lice-killing medications is not necessary to prevent spreading lice. Some people do so that others won't mistake them for having live lice.
- ✓ Check everyone in your household for head lice. Treat those who share a bed with the person with infestation, and those with live lice or nits close to the scalp.
- ✓ Clean hair items and bedding used by infested persons. Washing, soaking, or drying items at temperatures greater than 130° F will kill stray lice or nits.
- ✓ Don't spend a lot of time housecleaning, as lice are spread by head-to-head contact. Focus on items, clothing, furniture, or carpeting that have been in contact with the head of the person with infestation in the 24 to 48 hours before treatment. Use a vacuum for carpeting, car seats, and other fabrics or fabric covered items. Don't use chemicals or insect sprays.
- ✓ Human head lice don't feed on pets, so pets do not need to be treated.

WHAT ABOUT SCHOOL?

- ✓ No child should be excluded from school or allowed to miss school because of head lice.
- ✓ Children with nits only should be allowed to return to school.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

- ✓ Ask your child care program or school if you have questions about their head lice policy.
- ✓ Visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website:
www.cdc.gov/parasites/lice/head

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