

HEAD LICE IN THE COMMUNITY

(Parent Information Sheet)

Head lice are a common problem in schools. We regret this. To help you examine your children's hair and scalps for the presence of lice and to prevent recurrence, the following information is offered:

DETECTION OF HEAD LICE

The presence of head lice is usually accompanied by head scratching and intense itching. The lice are tiny and vary in color from gray to black. More likely, you will see eggs (nits), white oval specks tightly attached to the hair shaft about $\frac{1}{4}$ inch from the skin. These are most likely present at the nape of the neck or behind the ears.

HOW DOES A PERSON GET HEAD LICE?

Head lice do not jump or fly. They are transmitted directly from one person to another, or by contact with articles that have come in contact with an infested person (combs, brushes, hats, scarves, bedding, and upholstery). They cannot be carried by dogs, cats, or other animals.

ARE LICE MORE PREVALENT IN CERTAIN PERSONS?

Not really. Head lice are more prevalent in school-age children, particularly in lower grades. It is not symptomatic of any lack of cleanliness or personal hygiene.

CONTROL WHEN PRESENCE OF LICE IS DETECTED

- A. Purchase over-the-counter medicated shampoos or obtain a prescription from your physician. Stuffed animals, small pillows, etc. can be sealed in a plastic garbage bag for two weeks to rid them of lice. Pregnant/nursing mothers should check with their provider before treating their families.
- B. Follow the directions that accompany the shampoo exactly as is suggested. Always put the shampoo on the hair while the hair is still dry. Work it into the hair and leave it on the recommended maximum number of minutes. Then wash it out promptly and wash with regular shampoo. Comb through hair with a fine-tooth comb onto white paper and dispose of any combed-out lice into the toilet.

The eggs (nits) stick to the shaft of the hair. Since all nits are not killed by the shampoo, they must be removed by a fine comb or pulled off the hair shaft with your fingernails. Using Step 2 or a rinse of half vinegar and half water will sometimes cause the nits to comb out more easily. If your child has an unusually large number of nits, petroleum jelly can be rubbed into the hair and left on overnight. Nits will comb out easier.

- C. Repeat medication shampoo procedure in 7 – 10 days and again in another 20 days or as directed on the medicated shampoo box. The life cycle of the insect is 30 days.

DO NOT USE LICE SHAMPOO MORE OFTEN THAN DIRECTED, AS IT CAN BE HARMFUL WITH OVERUSE.

CLEANING ALL OTHER ITEMS

- A. Launder towels, bedclothes, and clothing in **HOT** soapy water, and dry on **HOT** dryer setting or out in the sun. Knit hats, scarves, etc., can be washed by hand and thoroughly sunned. (Washing clothes in the washing machine and drying in an automatic dryer is adequate.)
- B. Wash combs and brushes, hair curlers, etc. with the medicated shampoo or in a solution of ammonia (1 tsp. Ammonia to 1 gal. **HOT** water).
- C. Press all surfaces of mattress ridges and around buttons with a steam iron on **HOT** setting. Also, treat upholstered furniture that will tolerate it with a **HOT** iron.
- D. Vacuum upholstered furniture and carpets thoroughly. Shag rugs are likely sites for insects and eggs. (A general house cleaning will usually get rid of live lice.)
- E. Non-washable pillows, hair ribbons, etc. may be put in the clothes dryer on as hot a temperature as possible for 20 to 30 minutes.

NOTE: Lice can live off the body and on surfaces for 2 – 3 days (e.g., carpet, mattresses, clothing, etc.), so thorough cleaning and washing is important.

Inspect your child's hair regularly as this can be a reoccurring problem.