

What's Up with Head Lice?



Spring is here and students will be participating in a variety of sports and activities. While anticipating possible head-to-head contact during recreational activities, it is important to have a heightened awareness regarding the transmission of head lice. While there is no reliable data describing the usual incidence of a head lice infestation in the average school community or particular seasons of the year, parents should examine their child's head if the child exhibits symptoms (primarily itching) of a head lice infestation.

An estimated 6 million to 12 million head lice infestations occur each year in the United States among children 3 to 11 years of age. Head lice move by crawling; *they cannot fly or hop*. Head lice are spread by direct contact with the hair of an infested person. Spread by contact with clothing (hats, coats, etc.) and personal items (combs, brushes, or towels) is less common.

Life Cycle of the Head Louse

Head lice have three forms: the egg or nit, the nymph, and the adult louse. Nits are lice eggs laid by the adult female head louse usually within $\frac{1}{4}$ inch of the base of the hair shaft. Nits are firmly attached to the hair shaft, are oval, and about the size of a knot in a thread. Nits are often confused with dandruff, residue from hair products, or dirt particles. The nit hatches into a nymph in 6 to 9 days. Nymphs mature into adults in approximately 7 days. The adult louse is about the size of a sesame seed, has six legs, and is tan to grayish white in color. An adult head louse can live about 30 days on a person's head and will die within 1 to 2 days if it falls off the person. The adult female louse can lay about six eggs/nits a day.

Treatment of Head Lice

Treatment of head lice is recommended for persons with an active infestation. Treatment includes:

- ✓ Treatment with a pediculicide (RID or NIX). You may wish to discuss the use of Ulesfia, a new prescription treatment for head lice, with your child's health care provider.
- ✓ Remove eggs by combing with a nit comb.
- ✓ Retreatment in 7 to 10 days or per package instructions because no approved over-the-counter pediculicide is ovicidal (kills nits/eggs).
- ✓ Non-pharmacological measures include washing and drying hats, clothing, bedding, and towels worn or used by the infested person in the two-day period before treatment. Lice and eggs are killed when exposed to temperatures greater than 130°F for 5 minutes so launder in hot water and dry on the hot air cycle.
- ✓ Combs and brushes should be soaked in hot water (130°F) for 5 to 10 minutes.
- ✓ Vacuum upholstered furniture and floors that may contain hair fibers with nits.
- ✓ Items that cannot be laundered or dry-cleaned should be sealed in a plastic bag for two weeks.

Prevention

- ✓ Avoid head-to-head contact during play (sports activities, playground, slumber parties, camp).
- ✓ Do not share hats, coats, brushes, combs, hair ribbons/barrettes, or towels.
- ✓ Do not lie on beds, pillows, couches, or stuffed animals that have recently been in contact with someone with head lice.

School and Head Lice

- ✓ Please notify the school nurse if you need a second opinion in determining if your child has head lice or if you have treated your child for head lice.
- ✓ The school nurse will check your child when he/she returns to school after treatment and again in 7 to 10 days.
- ✓ *Your child's privacy will be maintained at all times.*