

Lice

Head lice are common and millions of children each year get them. Although they can be a nuisance, they don't cause serious illness and do not carry diseases.

- Lice are tiny insects about the size of a sesame seed. They are usually pale and gray in color.
- They feed on small amounts of blood from the scalp. They survive for less than a day if not on a person's scalp. They lay eggs and attach them to hairs close to the scalp.
- Their eggs and the egg casings are called nits. They are yellow to white in color. They are firmly attached to the hair shaft by a sticky substance that holds them firmly in place.
- Anyone can get head lice. It has nothing to do with cleanliness.
- They are spread by close, prolonged head-to-head contact. The chance is small for lice to be spread due to sharing items like combs, brushes or hats.
- The most common symptom of lice is itching. It may take up to 4 weeks of the lice being present for itching to begin. The most common areas for itching are back of ears and back of the neck
- Checking for head lice:
 - Be in a well-lit area
 - Part the hair and check the scalp and look for crawling lice and nits
 - Nits are firmly attached to the hair and usually no further than a half-inch from the scalp. The easiest place to find them is the hairline at the back of the neck and behind the ears. Dandruff, dirt particles and hair spray droplets can be confused for nits. However nits are well attached to the hair and the others are not.

Treatment:

Many of the over-the counter lice treatment products are less effective than in the past. Currently HPA recommends a product called Lice MD[®]. It is available without a prescription and is inexpensive. It should be used as follows:

- Apply to dry hair and massage through until the hair is thoroughly wet. Pay special attention to the nape of the neck and behind the ears
- Wait 10 minutes
- While hair is wet with the product, comb out lice and nits with the provided comb
- Wash hair with regular shampoo
- If live lice are seen again in 7-10 days – repeat the treatment

Environmental measures:

- Check all household members for lice and treat if present and treat all family members who share a bed with the infested person
- All items that have come in contact with the hair of the infested person in the past 48 hours should be cleaned
 - Hair care items can be soaked in very hot water for 10 minutes
 - Clothing, bedding and cloth toys should be cleaned in the washer in hot water and dried on a high heat setting.
 - Items that cannot be washed should be placed in sealed plastic bags for 48 hours
 - Vacuum rugs, upholstery, car seats and mattresses to remove nits

Please call the office if you cannot rid your child of lice or your child's scalp looks infected (swelling, pain, discharge or fever)