

HEAD LICE - PARENT HANDOUT

What are head lice?

- Head lice are small tan to grayish-white insects, about the size of a sesame seed and have six legs.
- Lice don't usually carry disease.
- Lice can live up to 30 days on a person's head and lay from 50-150 eggs.
- Lice need to feed on blood every 3-6 hours.
- If lice falls off a person, it dies within 2 days.

How did my child get head lice?

- Children get head lice from other children.
- Lice crawl from child to child anytime they are close together or by sharing combs, brushes, hair fasteners, hats, caps, coats, scarves, and even cell phones.
- Children get head lice almost as often as they get the common cold.
- If left behind, lice can attach to your child while sitting on carpets or furniture.
- Lice can attach themselves to stuffed toys.
- Lice cannot hop, jump, or fly.
- When live lice move from one child's head to another, they begin laying eggs immediately.

How do I know if my child has head lice?

- Itching is the first sign of lice.
- Check the entire head and scalp, especially behind the ears and near the neckline at the back of the neck when scratching begins.
- Lice eggs (NITS) may be found before you see lice because each lice can lay up to 150 eggs at a time.
- Nits are very tiny; about the size of a knot of thread and shaped like a long football.
- Nits are yellow to white in color and may be mistaken for dandruff or hair spray droplets.
- Nits attach to hair with a waterproof, cement-like substance and are difficult to remove.

How can I get rid of head lice?

- Treatment must be done with a shampoo or cream rinse approved by the FDA.
- Treatments can be purchased without a prescription at stores that carry drug store products.
- Follow treatment instructions closely.
- After treatment you will need to thoroughly comb and pick out the nits.
- All products recommend a second treatment 7-10 days after the first treatment in order to kill any remaining or newly hatched lice.
- Soak combs and brushes in lice shampoo for 1 hour in very hot water.
- Wash sheets, blankets, and bedding in the hottest setting possible.
- Dry clean non-washable items or seal them in a plastic bag for 1 week.
- Vacuum furniture, carpet, car seats, and mattresses thoroughly.
- Discard vacuum debris.

Myths and truths about head lice treatment:

- Using liquids like gasoline, kerosene, paint thinner, or insect repellent may harm your child more than it would the lice. Chemicals should not be used unless they are approved by the FDA for specific treatment of head lice.
- Do not use hair dryers to kill lice or their eggs. The temperature would have to be turned up so high it could easily cause serious burns on the scalp.
- Hair gels, hairspray, oils or other non-medicated hair products will not kill lice or prevent eggs from hatching or sticking to the hair. The nits will hatch and your child will be infested with lice again.
- Vinegar rinses or mayonnaise do not kill nits or detach them from hair.
- Cutting your child's hair or shaving their head to get rid of lice won't keep lice away. Lice stick to short and just "grown in" hair too.
- Pets and other animals don't carry head lice and can't contract head lice from people.