

HEAD LICE FACTS – A GUIDE FOR PARENTS- *Check your child's homework each night and check their hair for head lice. Stop lice in their tracks.*

A common problem

Lice are small insects that live on human hair. Children 3-11 are their usual hosts. Having head lice has nothing to do with poor personal hygiene. Lice do not jump, hop, or fly, nor do they typically survive off their human host more than 24 hours. They are mainly acquired by direct head-to-head contact with an infested person's hair and therefore are most likely transmitted in the home setting. Lice should not be considered a medical or public health problem, since they rarely (if ever) cause direct harm and are not known to transmit infectious agents from person-to person.

Signs and symptoms

Intense itching is the most common sign that your child may have head lice. Lice are about the size of a sesame seed; the color may be grayish-white to reddish-brown. Their nits are small, silvery-white and are attached to the hair shaft just above the scalp. Head lice are commonly found around the nape of the neck and behind the ears.

How do I treat this condition?

Use of an over-the-counter product is the first step in treatment. It is very important to follow any instructions that are included with the product. After using the product, use a metal nit comb to remove dead lice and nits. **Repeat the treatment with the product 7-10 days after the first application.** After another 7-10 days, re-examine the child's head. If live lice are still seen, treatment failure or resistance likely has occurred. A health-care professional will advise you to use a prescription product.

Other steps to take

Excessive cleanup in the home- that is major scrubbing of all surfaces and items in a room- is not necessary but the child's clothes, towel, and bedding should be washed in hot water or dried on high heat. The same can be done for the child's toys or blanket or with items used in the child's hair. Do not use insecticides on furniture, rugs or pets. Inspect other family members for head lice. Never treat your child for head lice unless you know he/she is infested. Smothering lice with mayonnaise, petrolatum, or olive oil is not recommended. These approaches have not been adequately studied. It is especially important to avoid using dangerous materials such as kerosene, gasoline, paint thinners or turpentine to get rid of lice.

What else do I need to know?

Children should understand the importance of not sharing combs, brushes or hats or any personal hygiene items. Children should also know that head-to-head contact with friends can transmit lice. Inspect your child's head carefully and frequently for signs of lice and nits. Pay close attention to children who consistently scratch their heads. If your child has a case of head lice, please inform your school nurse and classroom teacher.

For more information

For reliable information, visit the web sites, American Academy of Pediatrics: www.aap.org, the National Association of School Nurses: www.nasn.org, or contact your school nurse, or your family physician

