

Head Lice 101

What are Head Lice?

Head lice are tiny, greyish/tan wingless insects that live and breed in human hair. They hatch from small eggs-called nits, which are attached to the base of individual hairs. Nits cannot be washed away like dirt and dandruff. The nits hatch in ten days and reach maturity in about two weeks. As the lice feeds on its host, it injects saliva into the wound resulting in local irritation and itching. Lice do not cause disease and can be found on persons of any age, race, sex, or socioeconomic class. Lice do not discriminate and actually prefer clean hair to dirty hair because it's easier for the egg to be cemented to the hair shaft

How do they spread?

Head lice are very contagious. Direct head-to-head contact is by far the most common means of transmission. They do not have body structures like wings or musculature necessary for flying or jumping. Head lice do have six short legs that enable them to crawl very quickly.

How to prevent them?

They can be spread through the sharing of personal items such as combs, brushes, scarves and helmets. To minimize the risk of repeated outbreaks, remind your children not to share these items.

How are they detected?

The first clue that a child has lice is frequent scratching.
Nits may be glued to hair, most commonly behind ears and at or near the base of the neck.

To check for lice, carefully examine the hair with emphasis around the back of the neck and behind the ears. Head lice shy away from light, therefore you may only see their eggs or nits (small whitish ovals of uniform size attached to the hair shaft close to the scalp).

How are they treated?

Lice can infest people with any length of hair. Cutting or shaving the hair is not necessary. Shampooing the hair with medicated shampoo is necessary to kill the lice followed by thorough nit removal with a special comb. Shampooing alone is not enough. Nit removal is important.

When to return to school?

Once lice has been treated, and student is nit-free, the student may return to school. On the first day the student returns to school, please send them directly to the school nurse who will check the student prior to entering the classroom.

Still have questions?

Call the School Nurse!

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