



Chesterfield County Public Schools
Office of Student Health Services

INFORMATION FOR PARENTS ABOUT HEAD LICE

WHAT ARE HEAD LICE?

Head lice are tiny, wingless, tan/brown insects that live and breed in human hair. They are about the size of a sesame seed. The eggs, called nits, are easier to see than the lice themselves. The nits are yellowish--white, tear drop shaped, and are firmly attached, at an angle to the hair shaft close to the scalp behind the ears and on the back of the neck. Dandruff, lint, and hair spray globules can easily be brushed from hair and can be mistaken for nits. Unlike dandruff, nits are difficult to remove and cannot be brushed away. Head lice are most common among preschool and elementary school-aged children and their household members. Head lice affect all social and economic groups and are not influenced by hair length or frequency of brushing or shampooing. They survive by piercing the skin to feed on blood. Lice cannot survive away from the head for more than 24-48 hours. Indications of head lice may include the tickling feeling of something moving in the hair, itching, or having sores on the head caused by scratching. Although head lice can be a nuisance, they do not transmit disease or pose any health hazards.

HOW DO LICE SPREAD?

- Lice crawl slowly and cannot crawl long distances.
- They do not fly, hop, or jump.
- They do not live on pets.
- In most cases, head lice are spread by direct head-to-head contact with a person who already has head lice.
- Spread by indirect contact with shared objects such as hats, combs, brushes, scarves, headphones, blankets, pillows, and stuffed animals may also occur, but is less likely.

HOW DO YOU PREVENT HEAD LICE?

- Teach children not to share combs, brushes, hats, and coats.
- Do not try on other people's hats (not even in department stores).
- Teach children to hang coats separately – placing hats and scarves inside of coats.
- Check your child's hair if they frequently scratch their head or complain about itching.
- Getting rid of lice as soon as they are found can prevent them from spreading in your home

HOW TO CHECK FOR LICE AND NITS

- The first clue that a child has head lice is frequent scratching of the scalp.
- Head lice are very small. Bright light or natural daylight and magnified reading glasses might help you see the lice and nits.
- Look through the hair carefully, especially at the back of the neck and behind the ears for nits.
- Nits that are more than ¼ inch from the scalp are either hatched or dead.
- Since head lice shy away from light, you may only see the eggs (nits), small whitish ovals of uniform size (teardrop shape) attached firmly to the hair shaft.
- Look for movement especially at the neck and behind the ears

WHO SHOULD BE TREATED?

- Check all family members at the same time for lice and nits
- Treat only people who actually have live lice or nits
- The treatment will not prevent people from getting lice

HOW ARE LICE TREATED?

- Head lice can be treated at home with either over-the-counter or prescription medications called pediculicides. Several products are available to treat head lice. These are either shampoos or cream rinses.
- Use the lice medicine as directed on the box or label. If you have shoulder-length hair or longer, you might need a second bottle. Pay special attention to how long to leave it on the hair, and how it should be washed out
- Do not use a combination shampoo/conditioner, or conditioner, before using lice medicine. Do not re-wash the hair for 1 – 2 days after removing the lice medicine.
- Medications are generally safe and effective when used correctly. Some medications may cause itching or a mild burning sensation.
- After the initial treatment, comb or pick out all the nits with a fine tooth nit comb. Your child's hair should be clean, wet, well combed or brushed to remove tangles before using the comb. A conditioner may be used to lubricate the hair. Divide hair into small sections. Comb through each section until no more lice or eggs are found. Combing should be repeated daily until no lice or nits are seen.
- A second treatment is recommended 7-10 days after the initial treatment.
- Talk to a healthcare provider if you think re-treatment is necessary.
- The CDC does not have scientific evidence that suffocating head lice with mayonnaise, olive oil, margarine, butter, or similar substances is an effective form of treatment.

NOTE: Lice treatment products should NOT be used on pregnant women, nursing mothers, children under the age of 2, or persons who are immune-compromised, unless directed to do so by their healthcare provider.

HOUSEHOLD CLEANING

It is important to clean the home and car on the same day as treatment.

- Machine wash and dry clothes, beddings, stuffed animals, and items used by the infested person in the two days before treatment. Use hot water (130°F) and high heat drying. If you can't wash or dry clean items, seal them in a plastic bag for two weeks.
- Soak combs and brushes in hot water (at least 130°F) for 5 – 10 minutes
- Vacuum the floor and furniture, focusing where the infested person had contact.
- Vacuum cars and especially car seats.
- Dispose of the vacuum cleaner bag contents when finished.

IMPORTANT: Spraying or fogging a home with insecticides is NOT recommended. They can be harmful if inhaled or absorbed through the skin.

READMISSION TO SCHOOL

Your child may return to school after the first treatment.

School exclusion is not recommended for students with lice and/or nits. Research indicates there is low risk of transmission in classrooms.

References:

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