

HEAD LICE INFORMATION SHEET

We suspect that your child may have head lice. Please read the enclosed information carefully and complete/sign the last page.

What are head lice?

The head louse is an insect that lives and breeds on your head. Head lice feed themselves by biting your scalp.

Having head lice (pediculosis) is common; as many as 6 – 12 million people worldwide get head lice each year.

Who can get head lice?

Anyone who comes in close head-to-head contact with someone who already has head lice can get head lice. Head lice are found more often among children between the ages of 3 – 10, and their families.

How do I know if I have head lice?

- Tickling feeling of something moving in the hair.
- Itching, caused by an allergic reaction to the bites.
- Irritability
- Sores on the head caused by scratching. These sores can sometimes become infected.
- They are most often found around the ears and at the nape of the neck. They lie close to the scalp.

How do you get head lice?

- By close head-to-head contact with someone who already has head lice. Contact is common during play at school and at home (slumber parties, sports activities, at camp, on a playground, etc.).
- By using hats, scarves, combs, brushes, hair ribbons, pillows or towels recently used by someone with head lice.

What do they look like?

The insects are tiny, wingless, move quickly, and are difficult to see. They cannot jump or fly. They are 1-2 mm long and grayish brown in colour. There are three forms of lice: the nit, the nymph and the adult.

Nits: Nits are head lice eggs. They are hard to see and are often confused with dandruff or hair spray droplets. Nits are found firmly attached to the hair shaft. They are oval and usually yellow to white. Nits take about one week to hatch.

Nymph: The nit hatches into a baby louse called a nymph. It looks like an adult head louse, but is smaller. Nymphs mature into adults about seven days after hatching. To live, the nymph must feed on blood.

Adults: The adult louse is about the size of a sesame seed, has six legs, and is tan to grayish-white. Females lay nits; they are usually larger than males. Adult lice can live up to 30 days on a person's head. To live, adult lice need to feed on blood. **If a louse falls off a person, it dies within two days.**

How can I control the spread of head lice?

- Discourage head-to-head contact and sharing of hats, scarves, hairbrushes and combs.
- Tie long hair back in braids.
- Check the heads of all family members and people in close contact in case someone else has head lice.
- All family members with head lice should be treated at the same time.
- Tell all close contacts of the person with head lice to check their head. As well, tell the child's teacher and/or daycare worker.
- You cannot prevent head lice by using head lice shampoos or products – use them only if you have head lice.
- **Check young school age children weekly for head lice; more often if there is an outbreak.**

Important points to remember

1. Be sensitive to your child's feelings!
2. Lack of cleanliness does not cause head lice.
3. Both children and adults can get head lice.
4. Short hair does not prevent the spread of lice.
5. Head lice do not live on dogs, cats or other animals.
6. Head lice must be treated using an over-the-counter product available at the pharmacy. There are non-chemical alternatives, but they are not as effective.
7. Financial support may available for families on social assistance who need to treat head lice. Please contact your Ontario Works contact for assistance.
8. It is absolutely NECESSARY to repeat the treatment process on the 7th or 8th day. You must also comb the hair each day to remove nits.
9. All nits will need to be removed before students are able to return to school.

How to Treat Head Lice

1. **Check all close contacts.** If one person in the family has lice, it is possible that other family members will also have them. Tell your child's school, daycare, friends and other children's groups so that other parents can be notified to check their children's hair. An untreated source among close contacts is a common reason for getting head lice again. It is important that all individuals who have head lice in one home be treated at the SAME TIME. Talk to your doctor before treating children under two years, a person with a seizure disorder or a person with a scalp infection.
2. Buy a head lice shampoo or cream rinse from your drug store. There are many products available to treat head lice. Talk to the pharmacist before buying any product as there are advantages & disadvantages of different products.
3. **Apply the product following instructions carefully.** Misuse and overuse could be hazardous.
4. Head lice products kill the head lice, but not necessarily the eggs. The eggs (nits) must be removed using a special lice comb (also available at the pharmacy) or by hand using your fingernails. You must take the time to remove as many nits as possible after the treatment.
5. **Apply a second treatment 7 – 10 days** after the first treatment to kill any newly hatched lice before they mature and can begin to lay more eggs. This step is CRITICAL.
6. It is suggested that you limit regular hair washing between the two treatments and in the week following the second treatment. This may allow the head lice product to work more effectively.
7. **CLEAN YOUR HOUSE** – You must wash all hats, scarves, pillowcases, bedding and towels in very hot water. Place these items in the dryer on the highest heat setting possible. Wash all brushes, combs and headbands in very hot water. Put all pillows, comforters, stuffed animals and other items that cannot be washed in an airtight bag and seal it for 2 weeks. It is advisable to vacuum couches, car seats, helmets and other household items that may have come in contact with a head. **You will need to repeat this process after the 2nd treatment.**
8. Check the head for live lice daily between treatments and remove any nits that are still present. Use a bright light to help you see. Carefully check all sections of the head and remove all the nits by using fingernails or a nit comb to drag each nit down the hair shaft.
9. If live lice are still found in the days following the first treatment, consult your pharmacist.
10. Your child will not be allowed back at school until you have filled out the appropriate forms indicating you have treated the lice. School staff will check the hair to ensure that the majority of nits have been removed. If too many nits remain, the child will be sent home until they have been removed by the parent. This protocol is consistent with the recommendations of Toronto Public Health and helps to limit the possibility of re-infestation.

PARENT RESPONSE FORM

Complete this part of the form if NO head lice are found.

Date:

I have carefully checked _____ and I have found no evidence of lice or nits (eggs).

Signature of Parent:



PARENT RESPONSE FORM

Complete this part of the form if head lice ARE found.

Date:

- I have treated _____ for head lice with a product called _____ according to the product instructions.
- I have removed as many nits as possible. I understand that if too many nits remain, my child will need to stay home until visible nits are gone.
- I understand that I must examine my child's head daily for seven (7) days and continue to remove any nits that I find.
- I have informed my child's close friends and family of the infestation so that they can check their children. I realize this will help ensure my child is not re-infested.
- I have washed my child's entire bedding and any clothing that has been near his/her head.
- I understand that I will need to re-apply the lice product in 7-9 days, and that I will need to re-wash all bedding and clothing at that time.

Signature of Parent: