

Head Lice Information For Parents

Facts:

Headlice are small, six legged wingless insects, pin head size when they hatch, less than match-head size when fully grown and grey/brown in colour. They are difficult to detect in dry hair even when the head is closely inspected. They often cause itching, but this is not always the case, particularly when recently arrived on the head.

Head lice infest the head and neck and attach their eggs to the base of the hair shaft. Lice move by crawling; they cannot jump, fly or swim but spread by clambering from head-to-head.

Head lice can be a nuisance, but they have not been shown to spread disease. Dogs, cats, and other pets do not play a role in the transmission of human lice. Personal hygiene or cleanliness in the home or school has nothing to do with getting head lice.

Head Lice & Detection:

Lice hang on tight to the hair, usually close to the scalp where there is warmth, food and shelter from detection. The female louse lays eggs in sacs (nits) which are very small, dull in colour and well camouflaged. These glue securely to the hair and hatch out in 7-10 days. Empty egg sacs are white and shiny and may be found further down the hair shaft. Lice take 6-14 days to become fully grown, after which time are capable of reproducing and are also, able to move from head-to-head.

They are not fussy about hair length or condition. Clean hair is, therefore, no protection, although regular (e.g. weekly) hair washing and combing sessions offer a good opportunity to detect head lice and arrange treatment if discovered.

You should examine your child's head, especially behind the ears and at the nape of the neck, for crawling lice and nits. If your child exhibits symptoms of a head lice infestation. If crawling nits or lice are found, all household members should be examined and treated.

Treatment:

Both over the counter and prescription medications are available for treatment of head lice infestations. To eliminate head lice successfully, it is very important that all treatment instructions and steps be carefully followed and completed.

Alternative Method:

Comb through wet hair (conditioner will help) with a fine-tooth comb and systematically remove any live lice found. This should be carried out twice a week over a two-week period to clear the lice, as long as the person does not catch more lice, in which case half-weekly sessions must continue. Success depends upon adopting a painstaking approach but will avoid using chemical treatments.