

Look What Followed Me Home!!

Head Lice: A Common Problem

Except for the common cold, head lice are more widespread than all other childhood communicable diseases combined. Cleanliness, hygiene and income have nothing to do with who gets head lice. Lice are transmitted from person to person by direct contact or by sharing clothing/bedding or personal hair items with a person who has lice. They are common among all school children; parents can get them from their kids.



Head lice are tiny insects about one eighth of an inch long that live on the human scalp and hair. They cannot fly, hop or jump, but crawl rapidly from hair to hair. The female lice can live and produce eggs up to 30 days and can lay 3-4 eggs daily. These eggs are called “nits.”

Nits are very tiny, but they can be seen with the naked eye. They are glued to individual hairs close to the scalp and look like small oval specks. The color varies from white, gray, and/or brown. Nits hatch in 8-11 days and as long as they are present head lice may be transmitted to others.

Parents should be suspicious if children are often scratching their heads. There may be scratch marks on the scalp behind the ears or neck. If lice or nits are discovered it is important to notify the school promptly.

Prompt and proper treatment is essential in getting rid of head lice. Lice treatment shampoos are available at the drug store or local health department. Use shampoo according to directions on the bottle for persons known to have nits or lice. REMOVE ALL NITS AND LICE. A second shampoo is often required 7-10 days later to kill newly hatched lice. It is important to complete the necessary cleaning steps, especially vacuuming, at the time of treatment. Family members and close contacts need to be checked everyday for 14 days following treatment.

The school and the parent need to work together to prevent and control head lice. More information is available through your school office or the Oakland County Health Division.

SOURCE: Michigan Head Lice Manual 7/04



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