



ADVICE FOR PARENTS AND HEALTH WORKERS

What are Head Lice?

Head Lice are wingless creatures about the size of a match head when fully grown. They have three pairs of legs with large claws which enable them to grip onto the hair tightly.

They vary in colour from grey to brown. They are very hard to see as the colour blends in with the scalp and they move very quickly.

Head lice feed on your blood from your scalp up to five times a day.

The female head louse lives for about one month, and she lays several eggs a day, each the size of a pinhead. The eggs are off-white to brown in colour. These are glued on to the hair and hatch seven to ten days later. The empty egg shells are called nits.

How Do You Catch Head Lice?

Head lice cannot fly or jump and like to live close to the scalp.

Head lice are only caught when two people's heads are touching for a period of minutes. This is why they spread easily between children playing or working together in schools, and between members of the same family.

This is why it is also important to tell your family, friends and school if you have head lice, so that they also check for and treat head lice.

If you catch head lice it does not mean you have dirty hair.

How Do You Know You Have Got Head Lice?

Signs of head lice include:

- live or dead head lice in hair;
- nits (empty egg cases);
- cast skin cases of head lice;
- an itchy head;
- a rash around the neck or ears;
- dark gritty dust found on pillows or collars;

Remember...anyone can catch head lice - young or old.

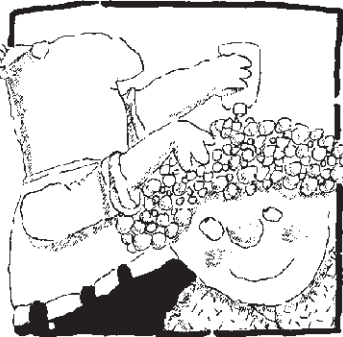
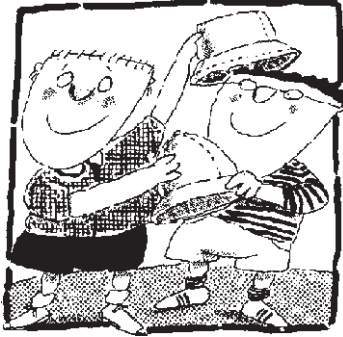
Check you family's hair once a week.

A Weekly Family Check For Head Lice

You should buy a detection comb (available from your drugstore).

Use the following to check your family's hair once a week:

- Wash hair.
- Comb wet hair with detection comb. You can buy these at your local pharmacy. For children with fine hair, use your fingers.



- Comb down from the root level for at least six inches (fifteen centimetres) over a sheet of white paper. This will make it easier to see any head lice, eggs, nits dislodged by the comb.
- Eggs are often found behind the ears, at the nape of the neck or under the fringe.
- If nits or eggs are found, keep combing every day for one week to make sure there are no live head lice. If no live head lice are found, continue to check weekly as above.
- If a live louse is found, **treatment is necessary.**

If you find live head lice on a member of your family:

- See your local pharmacist or physician. They will recommend the correct treatment for that person. Some treatments may not be suitable for babies, anyone with skin conditions, allergies or asthma.
- Follow the treatment exactly.
- If you are pregnant or breast-feeding and need treatment for head lice, before choosing a product, consult your physician or telephone the Mother's Program at the Hospital for Sick Children in Toronto at (416) 813-6780. If you're treating others, wear plastic or rubber gloves.
- Consult your doctor **before** deciding what to do:
 - for a person with a seizure disorder;
 - for treatment of children under age 2;
 - if head lice are discovered on eyebrows, eyelashes or beard;
 - if the skin of the scalp is broken or infected.
- Always follow the instructions given with the treatment if you do not follow the instructions, not all of the head lice may be killed and they may be harder to kill in the future.
- These products should not be used near the eyes, nose or mouth. A towel held tightly over the eyes protects them during treatment.
- When treating another person, wear plastic or rubber gloves to avoid unnecessary exposure to the product.
- After treatment, use a detection comb or fingers to comb out any dead head lice which have not been washed away. Check the hair with a detection comb every other day for a week. At the end of the week make a final check. You may still see empty egg cases (nits) even after all the lice have been killed. There is no need for more treatment but nits should be removed.
- If you still find live head lice after a week, see your pharmacist or physician again.
- Normally, you should not treat hair more than twice in three weeks.

Remember to tell all of your close contacts if you find live head lice so that they can check their hair.

SOURCES: 1. Newcastle City Health Trust School Nursing Service in association with The Medical Entomology Centre at the University of Cambridge, 1995. 2. Ministry of Health of Ontario Public Health Branch, January 1999.

Myths and Facts About Head Lice

NOT TRUE

1. A head lice infestation means the child/family is unclean.
2. Head lice can live for weeks in clothing, hats, brushes, and bed linen.
3. Head lice carry many diseases, and infestations have serious medical risks.
4. Head lice, body lice and pubic (genital) lice are all the same but are found in different sites.
5. All infestations with head lice come with symptoms.
6. There are no risks with frequent use of head lice treatments.
7. Head lice treatment products kill both eggs and adults equally well.
8. One treatment with a proper head lice shampoo/rinse is enough.
9. Spraying the house/furniture with an environmental head lice spray decreases the risk of head lice returning.

TRUE

1. Head lice can infest anyone, regardless of social class or level of personal cleanliness.
2. Head lice rarely survive off the human head for longer than 36 hours.
3. Head lice do not carry other human diseases or cause serious illnesses.
4. Head lice, body lice and pubic lice are different and have different disease risks.
5. Many people have no symptoms when they have head lice. All close contacts, such as household members and baby-sitters, must be carefully checked and treated if infested.
6. Improper use of accidental ingestion (for example, drinking) can be dangerous. Always carefully follow the directions for use. These products are poisonous if swallowed or overused.
7. Head lice are very sensitive to the treatments. Eggs are more likely to survive treatment.
8. A second treatment, 7-10 days later, is needed to kill any head lice that hatched from eggs not killed by the first treatment.
9. There is no data which shows that environmental spraying is helpful in controlling head lice. However, the side effects of insecticides may be harmful to family and pets.

SOURCE: Canadian Paediatric Society

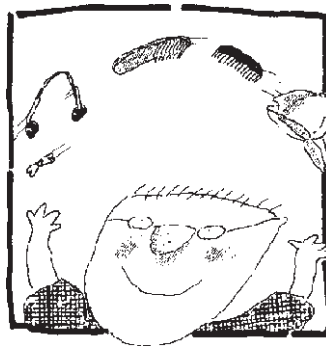
Guidelines For Your Home

1. *Cleaning personal items:*

- Extra housecleaning or use of insecticide sprays is not needed and may be harmful to family and pets. However, you will want to wash combs and brushes, headgear, hair accessories, pillow cases and towels in hot water.

2. *Instructions for you children:*

- Discourage your child from use in other family member's personal items and clothing, e.g., brushes, combs, hats, helmets, scarves and coats.
- Encourage your child to keep hats and scarves in coat sleeves, pockets, school bags or plastic grocery bags. This is important if they *share* a



closet with the family and don't have their own coat hook area.

- Give your children clear instructions about being in close contact with other children if they are going to a baby-sitter, sleep-over, etc.
- Let your children know that head lice are a nuisance, not a disease. Avoid making them feel ashamed.
- Cutting or shaving a child's hair can lead to teasing and causing a child to feel highly stressed. Get help (pharmacy, physician, VON) before you take this measure.