**Head Lice**

**Head and Home Management**

**A Little Bit About Lice**

Lice start their 45-day life cycle as eggs, then become nymphs and finally adult lice.

* The oval or teardrop-shaped eggs are also called nits.
* Adult females lay an average of 5 eggs per day.
* Eggs are typically cemented to the shaft of the hair very close to the scalp.
* Eggs can be white, yellow, tan or gray. The color may vary to match the color of the hair, making them difficult to see.
* Eggs hatch in 7 to 10 days and leave behind a white-colored shell, also called a nit.
* There is a theory that eggs/nits attached to hairs greater than one-quarter inch from the scalp have either hatched or will not hatch.
* Newly hatched nymphs crawl and seek a place to feed immediately.
* The nymph stage lasts 8-12 days.
* Adult head lice feed on blood every 3 to 6 hours.
* Females must mate and be fertilized to produce viable eggs. A mated female can produce eggs for her entire 30-day life.

Lice and eggs do not survive for long off the human head.

* Lice can only live 1 to 2 days off the head because they need a blood meal every few hours and the warmth and humidity of the human scalp to survive.
* Nits cannot hatch and usually die within a week if they are not kept near body temperature.

Head lice do not spread disease. They are annoying and irritating, but not dangerous.

**How Do You Get Head Lice?**

It’s much harder to get lice than to contract most communicable diseases.

* Lice are spread by head-to-head or hair-to-hair contact.
* Lice must crawl from one person to another. They cannot jump or fly.
* You can only get human lice from another human.
* Spreading of lice through hats, helmets and headphones is **rare**. It is more common for transmission to occur through pillows, hairbrushes or bedding.
* The risk of getting infested by a louse that has fallen onto a carpet or furniture is very small.
* School is not a common place for lice transmission. Transmission is more likely to occur through family members, overnight guests and playmates that spent a large amount of time together.
* Hygiene does not impact lice transmission.

**How Do You Keep Head Lice from Coming Back?**

Head lice infestations have been occurring for thousands of years. None of the many lice prevention theories been proven to be 100 percent effective. The best way to prevent lice from coming back is to thoroughly remove lice from the head and clean items that have been in contact with the head of the person with infestation in the 24 to 48 hours **before treatment**.

It's difficult to prevent the spread of head lice among children in childcare facilities and schools because there is so much close contact, but there are a few precautions that can be taken.

* While the chance of indirect transmission from personal items is slight, it is a good practice for children to hang garments separately other children's garments.
* Children should not share combs, brushes, hats and scarves.
* Avoid activities in which children have head-to-head/hair-to-hair contact, and teach them to avoid head-to-head/hair-to-hair contact.

**The Do’s and Don’ts of Lice Management**

Do’s

* Do not panic.
* Before cleaning, check everyone in the household at the same time. Include grandparents, younger and older siblings and parents even if they are not experiencing symptoms. Statistics suggest that 60 percent of people with head lice have no symptoms.
* To clean the items that the infested person wore or used in the 24 to 48 hours before treatment:
	+ Clean clothing, hats, coat collars, bed linens and other items using the hot water (130°F) laundry cycle and the high heat drying cycle for at least 20 minutes.
	+ For any items that can’t be washed, including stuffed animals, dry clean or seal in an airtight bag and store for 2 weeks.
	+ Vacuum bare mattresses, carpets, floors, couches, chairs and car upholstery. There is no need to discard the vacuum bag after cleaning.
* Soak combs, brushes, plastic barrettes, hair ties and headbands in hot water (at least 130°F) for 5–10 minutes.

Don’ts

* Don’t share combs, brushes, hats and scarves.
* Don’t avoid sharing protective headgear for sports and bicycling just to prevent lice transmission. Head injury prevention takes priority over lice transmission prevention.
* Don’t lie on beds, couches, pillows, carpets or stuffed animals that have recently been in contact with an infested person.
* Don’t use essential oils such as ylang ylang oil or tea tree oil on the scalp. These oils can lead to allergic reactions and have not been approved by the FDA (U.S. Food and Drug Administration).
* Don’t use highly flammable chemicals such as gasoline or kerosene on the head or hair.
* Don’t use fumigant sprays. They can be toxic if inhaled or absorbed into the skin.
* Don't use pesticide sprays or hire a pest control company. These treatments can be harmful.

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| **Sources:***Demystifying Pediculosis: School Nurses Taking the Lead*, Deborah J. Pontius, Continuing Nursing Education, PEDIATRIC NURSING/September-October 2014/Vol. 40/No. 5.*Head Lice Management in the School Setting* National Association of School Nurses Position Statements Resolutions and Consensus Statements Joint Statements, Revised 07-16 Center for Disease Control and Prevention:<https://www.cdc.gov/parasites/lice/head/index.html>MICHIGAN HEAD LICE MANUAL A comprehensive guide to identify, treat, manage, and prevent head lice. Michigan Dept of Education and Michigan Dept of Community Health. 2004. |