

Students

Exhibit – Important Head Lice Information for Parents

Important Head Lice Information for Parents

Anyone can get head lice. It is not reflective that a student is dirty or unkempt. Head lice are very common among school children because they like to share items and they want to be close to other people.

What is Head Lice? (Mature Louse)

Head lice are bloodsucking insects that live only on humans. Head lice only come from head lice. There are no other possible origins of head lice.

- Head lice do not hop, jump, or fly. They are wingless bugs about the size of a sesame seed or smaller. They have six legs with tiny claws and live only on human scalps. They range in color from light brown to gray.
- Head lice are contagious, after prolonged contact (more than just a few minutes) with another person who has them. The female louse crawls onto a child's head, either from the head of another child or from infected clothes, brushes or furniture. The female begins laying eggs, or nits, with a glue that firmly attaches the nits to hair shafts. That single female louse can lay 6-10 nits a day; nits hatch within about a week and begin feeding on human blood.
- Nits, or eggs, attach to one side of the hair shaft. They are white to light gray in color and do not come off easily.
- Head lice can live away from a human head for up to 48 hours.
- A hatched nit needs a human blood meal within 45 minutes to survive.
- A louse lives on a head for approximately 30 days.
- Signs and symptoms of head lice are itching around the ears, back of neck and crown of head.

Head Lice Facts

- Head lice are not considered a disease and do not carry diseases.
- The occurrence of head lice is no different in persons with long hair versus those with short hair.
- It does not matter to head lice if you are poor, rich, old, young, male, female, black, white, clean or dirty. They will and do infest anyone.
- Frequent bathing and hair washing is no guarantee against getting head lice.
- Pets do not give head lice to humans and humans do not give head lice to pets

Treatment of Head Lice

The treatment of head lice is a four-step process: kill live lice, check for nits and remove them by comb or by hand, treat family members, and treat your household.

1) **Kill live lice.** A medicated shampoo is needed to kill live lice. Check with a pharmacist or your physician about the many over-the-counter medicated shampoos and prescription shampoos. Check with your physician or pharmacist about new treatments that use natural ingredients and not chemical pesticides. Natural products such as "Lice-free and Lice Arrest have been reported to be effective.

- Lice shampoos often do not kill all nits and surviving eggs will hatch in 7-10 days. Therefore, a second shampoo treatment is needed in 7-10 days. Do not use a medicated shampoo in the bathtub or shower stall because it can hurt the exposed skin of the body. It is recommended that you shampoo the scalp over the sink.
- If sores or open areas are present on the scalp, consult your doctor.
- Using more medicated shampoo or leaving it on the hair for a longer time does not increase the chance of removing head lice, but it might be harmful to your child. Olive oil may be used at the same time or in addition to the shampoos to treat head lice. It smothers and kills live head lice. It is harmless and easy to apply. It makes nit removal easier and moisturizes the scalp after using a medicated shampoo. It may be used over and over again without hurting the child. A vinegar water rinse also helps loosen nits to make them more easily removed from the hair shaft. Do not use a creme rinse or combination shampoo/conditioner before using lice medication. Do not re-wash hair for 1-2 days after treatment.
- If a child has extra-long hair, you may need to use an extra bottle of the medicated shampoo. Do not treat head lice over and over again with the same medication; if it does not seem to work, call your doctor. Medicated shampoos may be irritating to the scalp and may cause dandruff and brittle hair that breaks easily.

2) **Check for nits and remove all of them with a comb or by hand.** Nits, or eggs, are attached to one side of a hair shaft at an angle. They are white to light gray in color and do not come off easily. Check for nits in bright light, daylight is best. Sit near a window or shine a bright light towards the head. If you have trouble seeing, get someone to help.

- Nits usually come off the hair shaft easier if the hair is slightly damp. For longer hair, part the hair into small sections and look for lice and nits section by section.
- If you can blow or flick it off, it is not a nit, and most likely lint or dandruff. Adding conditioner, olive oil or white vinegar and water solution may help loosen the nits and make combing easier. Mayonnaise, butter and Vaseline are smothering agents, but difficult to get out of hair, especially Vaseline. Children often do not like the smell of butter and mayonnaise and both of these can turn sour and cause problems if children suck on their hair.
- Total removal of nits is the only guarantee for being lice-free. A person is considered louse free if nit free for 10-12 days in a row.
- As a parent, you need to check for and remove nits. Removing every single nit takes a long time, but it is the only way we know for sure that the lice are gone.
- If your child has been exposed, check their head every day for 2 weeks because it often takes about a week before symptoms appear.

3) **Treating family members.** Once lice are found, everyone in the household should be carefully checked for lice and all who have it should be treated at the same time to avoid getting it again. If family members do not have lice, they should not be treated unless lice or nits are found. Using the head lice medication will not stop a person from getting lice.

- Recheck all family members that were treated for 2-3 weeks until you are sure all lice and nits are gone.

4) **Cleaning home and environment**

- Machine wash all clothing, hats, personal items and bed linens of the infested person in very hot water (at least 130 degrees), and then dry in very hot dryer for a minimum of 20 minutes.

- To ensure that the water temperature is hot, allow time between loads of laundry for water to reheat.
- Vacuum all carpeting, furniture, mattresses, pillows, car upholstery, headphones, car seats, bike or sports helmets, stuffed toys or anything that may have been in contact with the infested head.
- Thorough vacuuming is adequate cleaning; sprays are not necessary. Throw the vacuum bag or empty canister and wipe out after use.
- Place in a plastic bag for two weeks any clothing, stuffed animals, and comforters that cannot be washed or dry cleaned.
- Soak combs and brushes for one hour in rubbing alcohol, Lysol or wash with soap and hot water (130 degrees F).
- There is no need to have pest control come and spray the house.

Persistent Head Lice

Persistent head lice, or head lice that does not seem to go away, is defined as three incidents of live lice found over a six week period. Persistent head lice may be caused by several factors.

1. Improper use of medication. Either the shampoo was not left on hair for the right length of time or it was not reapplied 7-10 days later.
2. Not enough time spent combing and removing the nits. (This is the main reason for recurrence)
3. Not treating other family members with lice at the same time.
4. Improper cleaning of household and linens. (Everything must be washed in HOT water, vacuumed or bagged for 2 weeks).
5. The head lice medicine you are using may not be working and the head lice may be resistant to that medicine.

Prevention

- Do not share combs, brushes, hats, coats, scarves, towels, headphones or anything that comes in contact with the head, neck or shoulders.

Expenses

Treating head lice can be very expensive, especially if it's persistent. Expenses Include Medication, doctor's visits, dry cleaning, time spent on treatment, and missed work and lost wages for parents. If you are having trouble with the expenses of treating head lice, please contact the Olympia Family Coordinator, Michelle Maris at michelle.maris@olympia.org

Resources:

- Head Lice, Illinois Department of Public Health,
- Head Lice Information For Schools, Centers For Disease Control and Prevention
- DiLaura Devore, Cynthia MD, FAAP and Schutze, Gordon MD, FAAP, Head Lice, American Academy of Pediatrics, Volume 135, Issue 5

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