

# Head Lice



## WHAT EXACTLY ARE HEAD LICE?

Head lice are small parasitic insects that live mainly on the scalp and neck hairs of humans. These pesky little guys live close to the scalp and feed on human blood, just like a mosquito on your arm. Head lice don't care about how much money you have or where you live, or how often you wash your hair; they just want a good set of hair to hang onto for their next meal.

These little buggers are very common, they climb into the hair of about 1 in 100 kids between the ages of 3 and 12 each year. Most commonly occurring when everyone is gathered together again, like the start of school, Christmas break, and camp time when everyone is head to head giving lice the best chance to spread.

Lice will never be the superheroes of parasites, they have no hind legs or wings, so they can't jump or fly, but they can crawl pretty fast. Their super power is the ability to hide in the hair, cling tightly to the hair so they don't fall off easily and create a super glue to attach their eggs to the hair shaft.

This being said, it may not make you feel a whole lot better about the news that your child has head lice. Don't panic, here is some important information that will help you through this ordeal.

## HOW DO I KNOW IF MY CHILD HAS LICE?

### *What do they look like?*

Lice look like white-gray sesame seeds and can easily hide themselves in a person's hair. They crawl very fast, making them difficult to spot.

Their eggs (nits) look like tiny white beads. If you don't see any lice, but do see some white flakes on your child's head how you can tell if they are nits?

- Eggs (nits) are small, oval shaped, flakes attached to the base of the hair shaft. Usually within 1 cm from the scalp and they are very difficult to remove.
- If you're not sure if they are lice, ask the school nurse to take a look. Don't treat before you are sure it's lice, get a medical opinion first, they are often miss diagnosed.
- If you find lice or nits, check other family members as well.
- Contact other families who may have had contact with your child to give them a heads up.

### *What complaints would you expect to hear from your child?*

Anything from

- NOTHING- many kids don't realize they have lice, to
- TICKLISH feeling on their heads, especially at night when the lice are most active to
- CONSTANT ITCHING

### *How can kids spread lice?*

- Sitting head to head or hair to hair (like watching a friend play a handheld game or video with your head resting against theirs) is a common way to spread lice.
- Sharing pillows, blankets, or linens during naps or sleepovers, trading clothing, hairbrushes, hats, scarves, barrettes, car seats, or ribbon are also ways that can spread but uncommon

- Once lice fall out of the hair it can only live for a few hours without having human contact. They are also very weak, so it is hard for them to reattach to the hair.
- Lice live in the hair for only about 1 week but it can take 14 days for the eggs (nits) to hatch and restart an infestation.

*Head Lice have been around for a really long time, in fact the Egyptians' are said to have shaved their heads to avoid them. Even Cleopatra had them.*

#### ***Can our pets get lice from my child?***

Lucky for Fido, head lice only like human hair. So you can not get head lice from you pets or give it to your pets.

#### ***Can I tell who gave my child lice?***

There is no way to know who gave your child lice. It can take up to 2 weeks for the eggs to hatch before you or your child notice. Even if you know someone who has lice was with your child, it may never develop into an infestation. Your best bet is to periodically check your child for lice or nits.

## **NOW WHAT! HOW DO WE GET RID OF LICE?**

#### ***Can't I just wash my hair or go swimming to get rid of lice?***

- No, lice clings to the hair shaft and move more slowly when it's wet, but chemicals such as chlorine and routine cleansing products won't get rid of them.

#### ***Are chemical shampoos the only effective way to treat lice and nits?***

- The most common method of bug busting is to use over-the-counter chemical shampoos (such as RID or Nix), but they are not the only treatments.
- Lice MD is a new over the counter product that does not contain chemicals but has been very effective. Check with your healthcare provider.

- **No product is 100% effective by itself.** To become a really good bug buster here is a quick guide on some common lice removal methods:

#### **Chemical Shampoos/Rinses**

These chemical treatments are pesticides that harm lice but pose a low level of toxicity to humans when used as directed. It's very important to make sure you follow the directions and do not re-treat before recommended (usually 10-14 days).

#### **Prescription Meds**

These are prescribed by a physician and are typically only used if lice do not respond to any other treatment.

#### **Manual Removal**

This is using a fine tooth metal comb or special nit comb you can purchase at any pharmacy to try to remove lice and nits. Because it is very difficult to remove all lice and nits it is commonly used together with another method. It's important to comb the hair everyday for at least 10-14 days to help remove any new lice or eggs and prevent a re-infestation.



#### **Natural Treatments**

There is not a lot of research that shows how effective and safe the use of pantry ingredients, such as mayonnaise, vinegar, and oil to essential oils are in removing lice. Use these at your own discretion.

#### ***How do I treat my child who is under 2 or younger?***

See a pediatrician if you have a child under 2 who has lice. This is not common. Do not use over the counter shampoos/rinses without medical guidance. These pesticides can be harmful for very young children.

### ***How should I treat our home to get rid of the lice?***

Don't go crazy at home and throw everything away; don't spend extra money on professional cleaning or special sprays for the environment.

What you need to do is this:

- Plan a major attack on your child's bedding, hats, combs and brushes.
- Vacuum and wash bedding, towels, stuffed animals if possible and clothing in hot water.
- Place pillows, stuffed animals, that can't be washed, coats, blankets in a hot dryer for 20-40 minutes.
- Vacuum furniture and rugs.
- Soak combs and brushes in boiling hot waters. Wash daily in hot soapy water to keep them free of lice and nits.
- If you have items you cannot wash or dry put them in a plastic bag and seal it for 2 weeks.

### **What is the policy for Westfield Schools regarding students with lice?**

While head lice are a nuisance, they do not spread disease and are not considered a health issue. Parents have the prime responsibility of assisting in the prevention and management of head lice cases through regular checks of their child's hair and starting immediate treatment when they have a **confirmed** case.

Should a case of head lice be brought to the schools' attention, the school nurse will maintain confidentiality at school, verify presence of an active infestation (locating 1 or more live lice and live nits located

within 1 cm of the scalp) and bring it to the child's parent's attention for treatment.

Please contact the school nurse if you are treating lice at home. Parents, students, and school staff will be educated about head lice identification, treatment and prevention as needed.

If at all possible, students will not be excluded during the day from school for having head lice, as the management of head lice should not disrupt the educational process of the child. The need to exclude students from school will be determined on a case by case basis by the school nurse.

This decision is based on information outlined by the American Academy of Pediatrics, the National Association of School Nurses, Hamilton County Health Department, and the Center for Disease Control and the Harvard School of Public health.

Resources:

<http://www.cdc.gov/lice/head/factsheet.html#what>  
<http://www.aap.org/healthtopics/skinhealth.cfm>  
<http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/headlice/lice.pdf>