

HEAD LICE PREVENTION

More than six million Americans, mostly three to eleven-year-old children, are affected with *pediculus humanus capitis* each year. Head lice are wingless insects about the size of a sesame seed. Because of their color and speed, they are not easy to find. During their 30-day adult life, female lice lay an average of 125 eggs (or nits), which are silvery-white, about the size of a poppy seed and shaped like tiny teardrops. These nits are typically found along the nape of the neck or behind the ears, approximately ¼ to ½ inch from the scalp. During the summer or in tropical climates, however, they can be found six inches or more from the scalp.

Head lice are also transferred through the sharing of hairbrushes, pillows, towels or hats. For these reasons, it is helpful to remind your child not to share personal items. The good news is that head lice are not known to spread disease. Nor do they result from “BEING DIRTY.” In fact lice prefer clean, healthy heads.

Your child may not have any symptoms. Most children with head lice do not. Others have intensely itchy scalps. Also, if your child has sensitive skin, a slight rash may develop. Louse “infestations” occurs frequently between family members and close friends. So if your child is diagnosed with a louse infestation, it is a good idea also to check family members for lice and nits.

Once your doctor or health care professional has diagnosed head lice, follow his or her professional advice for treatment. We recommend only a FDA-approved product. The food and drug administration approval shows that they have tested the product for safety and effectiveness.

1. Thoroughly read the package insert and follow the instructions carefully.
2. Eight to ten days after the initial application, apply a second treatment, using the same OTC product to be sure all nits have been killed.
3. After another eight to ten day period, have your child re-examined by a health care professional.
4. If two treatments do not get rid of the lice, do not apply another OTC product on your child’s scalp. The lice may be resistant to the product. Instead, call your doctor. He or she will probably recommend a prescription alternative.

WHAT DO I DO ABOUT THE NITS?

Lice are fast and hard to catch. Moreover, their nits are hard to remove, because they are attached to hair strands with a strong, cement-like substance. For this reason, after applying a head lice treatment product, use a nit comb to help remove dead lice and their eggs. A good nit comb does not bend and has teeth that are close together, so nits the size of poppy seeds cannot escape the stroke of the comb. When combing, work on one small section at a time. Comb from the scalp to the end of the hair, then wipe the comb with a paper towel and move to the next section. Afterward, sterilize the comb in hot water (130 degrees).

Lice depend on human blood to survive and typically die within twenty-four hours without a host. Lice may, however, get caught in a hair brush, comb or headband. So wash hair care items and accessories in hot water (130 degrees). Likewise, lice may be trapped, for example, when towel-drying hair. So launder recently used clothes, towels and bedding materials in hot water (130 degrees) or tumble in a dryer on high heat. If your child sleeps with a special stuffed animal or blanket, wash it in hot water (130 degrees) too or place in a dryer on high heat. Articles that cannot be washed may be put in an airtight bag for two weeks and then wiped off well to remove debris from the dead louse or nits.

CHILDREN’S MINISTRIES HAS A “NO NIT” POLICY:

That means no one can come to a Children’s Ministries activity with nits present in their hair, even if they have treated them recently. There are no refunds for registrations or deposits if a child has to be sent home due to nits or lice.

RECOMMENDATION

We recommend that you check your children’s heads three weeks before leaving for an event. Often this can be done on the Wednesday nights. This will give the family time to clear it up before the event. Plan to check all children’s heads every week until the event. This is necessary if you have found any children with lice or nits in their heads. If you check all the children each week, then the child or children who have to be re-checked will not feel embarrassed, and make sure all the children are clear right before the event. Please check each child before you leave town, especially if you are traveling a long distance.