
FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT HEAD LICE

What are head lice?

Head lice are tiny grey/brown insects that live only on the scalp of human beings. They crawl quickly but cannot fly or jump. They are not found on household pets. Having head lice does not mean you are unclean. They do not spread disease. The saliva from head lice when feeding can cause itching. Scratching may cause sores, which can get infected. Adult female lice glue eggs on the hair shaft close to the scalp. Live eggs are oval and dark in colour similar to the hair colour. They are stuck to the hair and do not fall off if you touch them. Even after the eggs hatch (7-10 days), the white shells stay on the hair shaft. Baby lice start at pencil-dot size and mature in 7-14 days molting three times.

How are Lice Spread?

Anyone can get head lice. They spread by head to head contact. When children play, their heads often touch and lice crawl from one child to another and then on to family members. Head lice may also spread by sharing brushes, combs, hats and anything that is worn or used on the head – remind children not to share these items. Braid or tie long hair back e.g. in a ponytail. Check children's heads weekly and especially following school breaks, sleepovers and camps.

How do I check for Lice?

Use natural light or a bright light and a magnifying glass if you have one. Part the hair in small sections and look near the scalp. Lice crawl very fast so they are difficult to find. Look for dark eggs glued on the hair close to the scalp. These have been laid recently. They are often found in warm spots e.g. on the hair behind the ears, back of the neck and close to the scalp. Check all the people that live in your house. Visit our school website for a videos and documents on how to check for and remove lice.

What do I do if someone in my family has head lice?

If you find lice, tell anyone in close contact such as family members, friends and classmates so they can be checked for lice. Everyone in the house who has head lice will need to be cleared of head lice at the same time to control the spread. Treatment products are to be used only on people who have live head lice. They do not prevent people from getting head lice.

How do I get rid of head lice?

There are many head lice treatment products. New products such as Nyda and Resultz are available for people who do not want to use traditional insecticides. Read all instructions carefully and follow them step by step so that the product will work effectively. Check with your doctor or pharmacist to make sure the product is safe for your child. Wash and rinse hair in the sink, not in

the bath or shower. Using a lice comb with very small spaces between the teeth such as the Licemeister or Nit Free Terminator are the best to use. Combing and nit picking is the most important step to lice control since no product kills all of the eggs. Remove all the eggs or within 7 – 10 days some will hatch and you will see baby lice which will grow and spread to others. A new infestation is more easily recognized if you remove all the eggs. A second treatment 7 - 10 days after the first treatment is suggested to kill any newly hatched lice from eggs you have missed. Limit use of regular shampoo and hair products until a few days after first and second treatment to allow head lice product to work most effectively. Check every week to make sure lice are gone.

How do I get rid of all of the eggs?

Removing eggs (nits) and remaining lice after the treatment can end your head lice problems. Start by using a fine-tooth comb. Comb then remove the smaller eggs by hand.

- Sit under a bright light or in sunlight
- Have your child watch television, a video or read to keep still. Work for 10-15 minutes at a time.
- Work with a small section of wet hair (clip the rest out of the way)
- Comb the smaller eggs off the hair strands using your thumbnail and fingernail.
- Continue section by section until you remove all the eggs.

Check the hair 2 times a week for 4 weeks to make sure all the eggs have been removed. Methods using olive oil, mineral oil, tea tree oil, and hair gel have not been scientifically tested, they are not considered reliable or safe treatments for head lice.

Do I need to wash or clean anything else?

Soak combs, brushes in hot water and head lice product for 5 - 10 minutes. Wash clothes, hats, towels and bedding used in the past three days, in hot soapy water and dry in a dryer for 20 minutes after the first and second treatment. Vacuuming is helpful, but special sprays are not needed on furniture or floors. Excessive cleaning is not necessary since lice live only a short time away from the head.

When can my child return to school?

We ask your cooperation in doing regular screening and checking of your child to help manage head lice outbreaks in the school. A child can return to school when there is no live lice present. Your school may ask you to provide a letter verifying that treatment has occurred and with your permission, your child may be screened by a trained staff member or volunteer prior to returning to class. The Canadian Pediatric Society (CPS) encourages schools to avoid no-nit policies because of the frequency of misdiagnosis and because head lice do not spread disease. The CPS claims that no-nit policies are outdated and based on reactionary tendencies rather than scientific information. A no lice policy is more realistic which recommends children stay at home to receive treatment if live lice are found on the head.

Where can I go for additional information?

Additional information is available on the Division website, www.gypsd.ab.ca, school website, Alberta Health

Link Toll-free: 1-866-408-5465 (LINK); Edmonton: 780-408-5465 (LINK) and My Health Alberta <https://myhealth.alberta.ca>.

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