

FACTS ON HEAD LICE

Health officials assure us that head lice are a common problem for children in child care settings and schools. Head lice are insects which live on human heads. They live and lay their eggs, called nits, close to the scalp. The nits are tiny (about the size of the eye of a needle) and grey, white, or brownish in color. They are very firmly cemented to the shaft of the hair. Head lice are an extreme nuisance, but do not carry disease. Anyone can get head lice. They are not a sign of being dirty. It is important to remember that head lice cannot jump or fly. They are spread through direct person-to-person contact and by sharing personal items such as combs, brushes, and hats. Head lice usually do not live longer than 48 hours off the head. They only lay their eggs while on the head. Nits will not hatch if they have fallen off the head. Lice do not spread to or from pets.

Itching on the head and scratch marks that may look like a rash, are a sign of head lice. They are most likely found behind the ears or at the back of the head. With good light or a magnifying glass you can see them. The nits look like dandruff, but cannot be removed easily. Nits are cemented to the hair shafts, and usually need to be removed with special combs or pulled off using your fingernails. To prevent contracting head lice, avoid sharing hair care items, towels, bedding, clothing, hats, and headgear. Frequent checking of your children's heads throughout the year can be an effective way of controlling the spread of head lice. All members of the family should be checked if one person has head lice. Only those who have lice should be treated.

To treat lice:

- Use a lice-killing shampoo, lotion or cream rinse obtained either over the counter at the drugstore or by prescription from a physician. It is recommended that you shampoo the head first with an abrasive shampoo (one that doesn't have a conditioner in). The head should be rinsed as usual after shampooing and towel dried before using the lice-control drug so as not to dilute the product on a head that is too wet.
- Follow the directions carefully. Directions will vary depending on the product used. Use the entire container on each head that you are treating and leave it on for the recommended period of time. The solution must be thoroughly massaged into the scalp. Remember, the scalp is where the lice live, not the ends of the hair.
- The lice don't necessarily die immediately. It might take as long as 24 hours or so. If live lice are seen two days after treatment, try a different brand.
- For some medication, a second treatment is recommended 7-10 days later to kill any lice that may have hatched after the last treatment. If you use a prescription medication, follow the directions given by your physician carefully. More than two treatments are unnecessary and could be harmful.
- The nits must be pulled off the hair shaft with the fingers or with a fine-toothed comb. If a vinegar and water solution is used to loosen the nits, it should be used before the lice control drug, and should be thoroughly rinsed from the hair before using the drug.
- Combs, brushes and similar items should be thoroughly cleaned in hot, soapy water. Add a small amount of bleach and soak for 10 minutes.
- Recently worn clothing (within 3-4 days) and bedding should be washed in hot (130°F) water or dried in a hot dryer for at least 10 minutes before being used again.
- Items which can't be washed such as stuffed animals, coats, pillows and blankets can be dry cleaned; sealed in plastic bags in a cool, dry place for two weeks; placed in a hot dryer for 20 minutes or put in a sealed plastic bag and placed in the freezer overnight.
- Clean floors, furniture, mattresses and carpeting daily by thoroughly vacuuming. The use of insecticide sprays is not recommended.
- The seats in cars should also be thoroughly vacuumed on a daily basis.

Once your child has been found to have head lice, and they are treated, the child must stop in the health office before re-entering school to be checked by the nurse or health aide to confirm that they are free of head lice. Please keep the above information as a reference should a future concern develop. If you suspect that your child has contracted head lice, Sandy Schulz, our school district's nurse can be contacted at 779-7940 Ext. #17132 for more information.