

Lice Awareness Wednesday

Treating and Controlling Head Lice

1. Catching head lice

- Head lice have been around for many thousands of years. Anyone can get head lice.
 - Head lice are small, wingless, blood sucking insects. Their color varies from whitish-brown to reddish-brown.
 - Head lice only survive on humans. If isolated from the head they die very quickly (usually within 24 hours).
 - People get head lice from direct hair-to-hair contact with another person who has head lice. This can happen when people play, cuddle or work closely together.
 - Head lice do not have wings or jumping legs so they cannot fly or jump from head to head. They can only crawl.
-

2. Finding head lice

- Many lice do not cause an itch, so you have to look carefully to find them.
 - Head lice are found on the hair itself and move to the scalp to feed.
 - They have six legs, which end in a claw, and they rarely fall from the head.
 - Louse eggs (also called nits) are laid within 1.5 cm of the scalp and are firmly attached to the hair. They resemble dandruff, but cannot be brushed off.
 - Lice can crawl and hide.
 - The easiest and most effective way to find them is to follow these steps:
 - Step 1: Comb any type of hair conditioner on to dry, brushed (detangled) hair. This stuns the lice and makes it difficult for them to grip the hair or crawl around.
 - Step 2: Now comb sections of the hair with a fine tooth, head lice comb.
 - Step 3: Wipe the conditioner from the comb onto a paper towel or tissue.
 - Step 4: Look on the tissue and on the comb for lice and eggs.
 - Step 5: Repeat the combing for every part of the head at least four or five times.
 - If lice or eggs are found, the hair should be treated.
-

3. Treating head lice

- Treating head lice involves removing lice and eggs from the hair. There are two ways you can do this:
 - 1 - Buying and using a head lice lotion or shampoo, following the instructions on the product
 - 2 - Using the conditioner and comb method (described under 'finding head lice') every second day until there have been no live lice found for ten days.
- If you choose to use a head lice product, always read and follow the instructions provided with the product carefully.
- The following points may also be helpful:
 - Head lice products must be applied to all parts of the hair and scalp.
 - No treatment kills all of the eggs so treatment must involve two applications, seven days apart. The first treatment kills all lice; the second treatment kills the lice that may have hatched from eggs not killed by the first treatment.
 - Cover the person's eyes while the treatment is being applied. A towel is a good way to do this.
 - If you are using a lotion, apply the product to dry hair.

- If you are using a shampoo, wet the hair, but use the least amount of water possible.
- Apply the treatment near the scalp, using an ordinary comb to cover the hair from root to tip. Repeat this several times until all the hair is covered.

4. Testing resistance

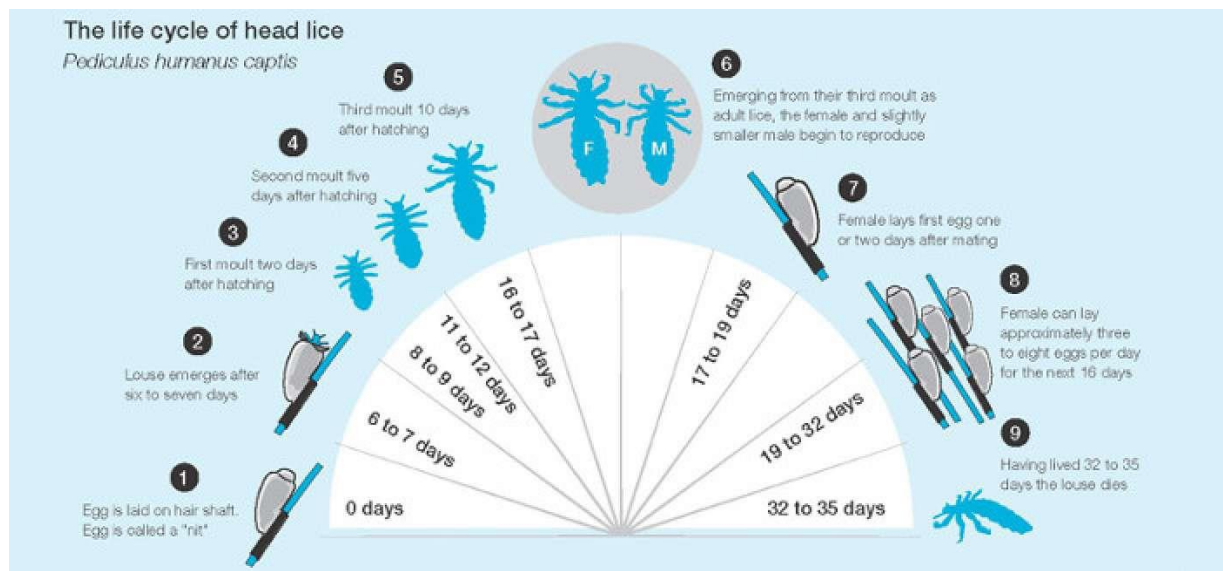
- Head lice products belong in one of the following categories depending on the active compound they contain:
 - pyrethrins
 - synthetic pyrethroids (permethrin, bioallethrin)
 - organophosphates (maldison or malathion)
 - herbal with or without natural (non-chemical) pyrethrins.
- Insecticide resistance is common, so you should test if lice are dead. If they are, treat again in seven days using the same product. If the lice are not dead, the treatment has not worked and the lice may be resistant to the product and all products containing the same active compound. Wash off the product and treat as soon as possible using a product containing a different active compound. If the insecticide has worked, the lice will be dead within 20 minutes.
- Any head lice product could cause a reaction and should be used with care by women who are pregnant or breastfeeding, children less than 12 months old and people with allergies, asthma or open wounds on the scalp. If you are unsure, please check with your pharmacist or doctor.

5. Head lice combs

- Combs with long, rounded stainless steel teeth positioned very close together have been shown to be the most effective; however, any head lice comb can be used.

6. Head lice eggs

- Head lice eggs are small (the size of a pinhead) and oval. A live egg will 'pop' when squashed between fingernails.
- Dead eggs have crumpled sides and hatched eggs look like tiny boiled eggs with their tops cut off.



The following website offers further information: www.health.vic.gov.au/headlice egg