

MID-DEL HEALTH NEWS

Facts About Head Lice

Head lice are tiny, wingless insects that live close to the human scalp and feed on blood. The eggs, also called nits, are tiny, tear-drop-shaped eggs that attach to the hair shaft. Nits often appear yellowish or white and can look like dandruff but cannot be removed or brushed off easily. The nymph, or baby louse, is smaller and grows to adult size in one to two weeks. The adult louse is the size of a sesame seed and appears tan to grayish-white in color. An itchy and inflamed scalp is a common symptom of lice. Although not common, persistent scratching may lead to skin irritation and even infection.

Head lice are NOT related to cleanliness. In fact, head lice often infest people with good hygiene and grooming habits. Head lice are most often spread by direct head-to-head contact. For example, during play at home, slumber parties, sports activities, or camp. However, lice can also be spread via objects that have been in recent contact with a person with head lice such as hats, scarves, hair ribbons, combs, brushes, stuffed animals, and bedding.

Prevention: Examine school age children's hair weekly for lice or nits. According to the CDC (Center for Disease Control), nits take approximately 1 week to hatch (6 to 9 days). This means that repeated lice treatments after the initial treatment should occur at day 7 and day 10. Since most lice treatments don't effectively kill the eggs, the timing of retreatment needs to be both early enough so that newly hatched lice aren't mature enough to lay new eggs, but late enough so that all eggs have hatched. The best strategy may be to repeat the lice treatment twice, at 7 days and 10 days following the initial treatment.

Treatment: Removing both the live lice and the nits (eggs) is essential for the complete treatment of head lice. Wash hair with shampoo designed to eradicate lice. Follow the directions on the label. Shampoos with added Tea Tree Oil may be used. Leave lice shampoo on the hair for 10 minutes before rinsing. Be sure to not get the oil in the student's eyes. Nits must be removed by hand. Make sure you have a good light source, natural light is best. Divide hair into small sections, comb with a lice comb and use your fingers to remove any nits that do not comb out. Recheck child's hair daily for 2 weeks. Make sure to wash all clothing, towels and bed linens used by family members found to have lice. Use very hot water and dry in a hot dryer. Vacuum all rugs, mattresses and upholstered furniture. Treat all combs and brushes with lice shampoo or hot soapy water. Any items such as stuffed animals that can't be washed should be placed in a plastic bag for 2 weeks. Treat hair of everyone in the household who have been exposed to lice and clean those areas in the home in the same way to prevent re-infestation. Repeat lice treatment twice, at 7 days and 10 days.



Nymph and mature louse



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