

Helpful Hints - Checking for Lice and Treating Lice

Some Facts About Head Lice:

Head lice are tiny insects that live on the human scalp; they feed on human blood, much like mosquitoes. These lice do not transmit disease, and although they are a nuisance they are not a health hazard. Because lice are spread through close personal contact, outbreaks are most common in schools. Anyone can get head lice.

How Are Lice Spread?:

Lice are wingless insects. They cannot fly or jump. They can spread relatively quickly, however, from head to head, usually through the sort of close personal contact that goes on in schools. Lice are also spread through the sharing of personal articles such as hats and other head gear, hair brushes, scarves, ribbons, and so on. You should discourage your children from using or borrowing any personal items like these from their friends.

What Are the Symptoms?

The most common symptom of head lice is constant itching of the scalp. This may be accompanied by scratch marks or small red lesions resembling a rash.

How Do I Check For Lice?

Because lice are tiny, mobile, and hard to spot, it's easier to look for their eggs (nits) rather than the bugs themselves. Live nits can be difficult to spot because they are tan-colored and blend in with the hair. Dead nits are silvery-colored and easier to see. These silvery oval specks are "glued" tightly to individual strands of hair, very close to the scalp. They are very small, about 1/3 the size of a sesame seed. They are most commonly found behind the ears and at the back of the neck (just above the hairline). Because "nits" can sometimes be mistaken for particles of dandruff, it is sometimes useful to use a magnifying glass when searching. If you do find nits, then lice are sure to be there as well.

What Is the Best Treatment?

Once discovered, head lice can be treated easily, as long as the following four steps are followed:

1. Check all family members.
2. Treat all infested family members at the same time.
3. Use treatments that a pharmacist would suggest, or natural treatments (** A great natural treatment to try is to soak your child's hair in olive oil, place a shower cap over top and have them sit with the oil on their hair for 2 or 3 hours. Then shampoo with regular shampoo (many times), or use Palmolive Dish Soap to rinse. Also, try using hairspray on your child's hair. Lice tend to want to stay away from hair products.)
4. Repeated and thorough use of "nit" comb until the nits are removed. Hand-picking the nits out of your child's hair is also a must.