

## PREVENTION AND CONTROL OF PEDICULOSIS

### How You Get It

Head lice can be transmitted through close personal head-to-head contact with another infested individual or less frequently through use of common combs, brushes, and other grooming aids; through sharing hats, caps, wigs, coats. Most parents have the impression that lice become established on persons who are unclean. In the case of head lice, this is **NOT** true. Frequent bathing will neither prevent head lice nor eliminate an infestation once it has become established. As it is not possible to determine the identity of the source, parents are encouraged to focus their energy on ensuring that all children and adults in the home are inspected and treated as appropriate.

### What to Look For

Head lice are parasitic insects that need the host's blood supply to survive, therefore, thrive near the scalp. They are elongated insects about this (--) long and are grayish white with dark margins. Lice do not have wings and therefore, **cannot** fly. They do not jump, but do move quickly; this makes them difficult to find in the child's hair.

Since crawling forms are so difficult to see, the diagnosis of pediculosis infestation is frequently made on the basis of finding nits. Nits alone do not signify an active infestation and should not be treated unless verified by a health professional. A nit is a louse egg. Nits are teardrop in shape, about this size (-), and vary in color from yellowish brown to white. Head lice attach each nit to a hair shaft with a waterproof, cement-like substance. Thus, nits cannot be washed or brushed out of the hair like dandruff or other debris that sometimes look like nits to the naked eye. Clusters of nits may be found in any section of hair, especially behind the ears and at the back of the neck; but, in mild cases, a careful examination of the entire scalp may be necessary to detect them. Watch for redness of the scalp and for itching. A bright light directed at the scalp can be helpful for identifying nits.

### Treatment

Treatment should be considered only when live lice or viable eggs are observed. Important to understand is that lice eggs are firmly attached to the hair shaft and cannot be "flicked" away. Treatment is directed at the infested individual and his/her personal articles, e.g., caps, combs, brushes, towels, bedding, etc. Fumigation or use of insecticides in the home is not recommended by the U.S. Public Health Service.

#### 1. Individual Treatment

- A. Apply head louse shampoo according to your physician's instructions or label instructions provided by the drug manufacturer. Several medicated shampoos (Pediculicide) are available for head lice.
- B. Have child put on clean clothes after treatment. Wash the child's clothes and linens separately from family laundry, put the clothing in the dryer on high heat for 20 min or place them in freezing temperature for several days.
- C. Cover the child's shoulders with a clear, dry towel: then, fine tooth comb the hair. Comb small amounts of hair at one time. (Do this outside the house, if possible)
- D. Shampoo the morning after the treatment using a mild shampoo followed by fine tooth combing as above. Using a hot hair dryer with caution may also suffice in killing lice and their eggs.

- E. The child may return to school immediately following treatment. Readmission is based on the recommendation of school nurse.
- F. Carry out fine tooth combing daily and wash hair thoroughly with regular shampoo. Do not use conditioners between treatments.
- G. Examine all family members of infested children. Only family members who have crawling forms or viable nits should be treated. Siblings or a parent who share a bed with a child known to be infested should be examined very carefully to determine if there is evidence of infestation. Continual awareness and frequent checking is important.
- H. While pediculicides rapidly kill crawling lice, they do not kill all the nits. Therefore, the treatment must be repeated in seven to ten days, or as directed on package label, to kill any newly hatched lice. The seven to ten day interval corresponds to the incubation period of a louse's egg. Pediculicide shampoos can be toxic and irritating and should not be overused. Follow the instructions for shampooing.

## **2. Disinfection of Personal Articles and Environment**

- A. Since heat is lethal to lice and their eggs, personal articles should be machine washed in hot water and/or dried using the hot cycle of the dryer. If total reliance is placed on the clothes dryer for disinfection, dry articles for at least 20 minutes at the high heat setting. Some non-washable articles may be disinfected in the dryer provided that high heat will not harm the material. Items can also be bagged for 2 weeks or placed in freezing temperature for several days.
- B. Combs, brushes, and similar items can be disinfected by soaking when in either one of the pediculicide shampoos, or a two percent Lysol solution for one hour, or by soaking them in a pan of water heated on the stove to above 140 degrees Fahrenheit for five to ten minutes (caution: heat may damage some combs and brushes).
- C. The U.S. Public Health Service recommends that environmental clean-up be consistent and limited to careful vacuuming of carpets, upholstered furniture, personal belongings, etc. Use of insecticides or fumigants on upholstered furniture, carpets, bedding, etc., is not recommended. These recommendations should be applied in homes as well as in the school environments.

Please call either your physician or the school nurse for further information if you have any questions. You must have your child checked by the school nurse before re-entering class.

Thank you for your cooperation.