



Head Lice:

A Nit-Pickin' Nuisance

FACT SHEET

Facts about head lice

- Head lice pose no health risk; they are only a common nuisance.
- Head lice are spread by head-to-head contact with someone who has lice.
- Lice can also be spread by sharing personal items that are likely to come in contact with the scalp, such as headwear, scarves, towels, bedding, helmets and hair brushes.
- Getting head lice has nothing to do with cleanliness. Anyone can get head lice.
- Head lice spread quickly among children in child care programs, schools and recreational groups because of the close contact between children.
- Head lice cannot live on pets or animals, only on humans.
- Keeping hair short will not prevent head lice.
- It's possible to get head lice more than once.



Checking for nits – the best “prevention”

- Check hair for nits and lice regularly and under good light (in front of a window or under a lamp). Part and lift strands of hair when checking.
- Nits are usually found close to the scalp attached to the fine hair behind the ears, at the back of the neck and above the forehead. They may look like dandruff but will not flick off the hair. Live lice are usually found on the scalp or in the hair, but crawl very quickly and are hard to see.
- Head lice products **do not prevent** you from getting head lice. Use them only when you see

lice or nits. Do not use these products on a routine basis!

What do I do if someone in my family has head lice?

If your child has head lice, tell the school or child care centre right away. They can tell other families to watch for and treat any lice that may appear. Everyone in the house with lice will need to be treated at the same time.

What are head lice?

- Head lice are tiny, brown insects about the size of a pinhead that live on the scalp. They cannot jump or fly, but can crawl quickly from one person's head to another.
- Adult lice live for 10 - 20 days on the head.
- The female louse can lay between 50 and 150 eggs.
- The eggs (nits) are tiny, oval-shaped, yellowish-white specks that are firmly attached to the hair close to the scalp. The nits may also appear dark in colour.
- Nits hatch after 7 to 10 days. Baby lice are called nymphs.



How do I treat head lice?

WARNING

Consult your doctor or pharmacist regarding treatment of:

- children under the age of 2
- pregnant or breastfeeding women
- anyone with a skin irritation on the scalp
- anyone with a seizure disorder
- anyone with allergies
- lice or nits on the eyebrows, eyelashes or facial hair.



Head lice magnified on a comb.

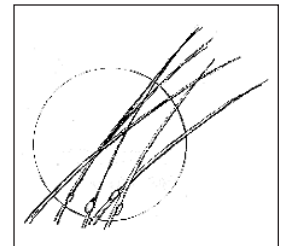
DO NOT USE flea control products, turpentine, paint thinner, kerosene etc.

TREATMENT

- Treat head lice or nits right away.
- Ask your pharmacist to suggest an effective treatment product. Check for ingredients that may trigger allergies.
- Some treatment products are covered under the Ontario Drug Benefit Program – ask your doctor or pharmacist.
- Follow the product instructions very carefully.
- Since no treatment product kills all the nits, we recommend that you always remove all nits.
- If you see live lice 24-48 hours after treatment, immediately treat again with a different product.
- Treat again with the head lice product in 7 to 10 days to prevent the lice from returning.
- There is no evidence that products like tea tree oil or home remedies are effective in treating head lice.

How do I remove all the nits?

- Sit under a bright light or by a window.
- Let your child watch television or a video/DVD, or read a book to keep busy.
- Nits are usually attached to the hair shaft, close to the scalp.
- Look for nits by parting the hair in small sections, going from one side of the head to the other.
- Remove nits by using your thumbnail against your first finger to grab the nit and slide it along the entire length of the hair shaft. A fine tooth comb may also be useful in removing nits.
- Place nits in a plastic bag. When you are done, seal or tie up the bag and throw away.
- Removing nits can be frustrating work, so be patient. Take breaks often, especially with young children.



Magnification of nits.

Cleaning personal items

- Washing combs, brushes, headwear, pillow cases and towels in hot water will help remove lice. The heat of the water or the hot cycle of your clothes dryer will kill any live lice and nits.
- Excessive house cleaning is not needed. Do not use insecticide sprays.

Remember, anyone can get head lice. Be sensitive to your child's feelings.

For more information about head lice check out these web sites:

Perth District Health Unit – www.pdhu.on.ca

Canadian Pediatric Society – www.cps.ca/caringforkids/whensick/headlice.htm

University of British Columbia – www.healthcare.ubc.ca/lice/intro.html



For more information, call Health Line at 519-271-7600 ext 267
Listowel area residents call 1-877-271-7348 ext 267
www.pdhu.on.ca