

Head Lice

LICE (Head) – Pediculosis Capitis

DESCRIPTION:

Head lice are tiny insects that live and feed on the skin of the scalp among human hair. They glue eggs (nits) to the base of the hair shaft. Nits hatch in 5-10 days.

Lice do not hop, jump, or fly. They migrate through direct contact with an infested person or their belongings. Sharing or co-mingling of personal items such as combs brushes, hats, or coats will allow transmission.

Lice are not known to transmit a disease. The medical problem they present is itching of the scalp, which can cause intense scratching. This can result in impetigo, boils or other infections, which can cause enlarged lymph nodes.

Also harmful to a child is the embarrassment caused by publicly (in a classroom) identifying them as carriers.

TECHNIQUE FOR INSPECTION:

An average infestation is from 5-10 lice that move quickly from view. Therefore, the diagnosis is often made by the presence of nits. These can be confused with dandruff, but are easily identifiable with a magnifying glass. Since nits are attached firmly, try removing one. If it sticks, it is a nit. If it is more than ¼ to one inch from the scalp, it has likely already hatched and may flake off easily. Nits can usually be found at the back of the neck and around the ears attached near the hair root.

Have child lean head forward; lift hair at the back of the neck. Section the hair by using a new tongue blade for each student. Continue throughout the hair. Inspect scalp for signs of bites or infection from scratching.

Despite widespread belief, recent studies show that vinegar or mayonnaise is not helpful in removing nits. There are non-insecticidal shampoos available, which dissolve the glue that binds the nits to the hair shaft. Special nit combs will work best when hair is wet, requiring several sessions to get them all.

AT HOME TREATMENT:

Pediculicidal shampoos kill lice but rarely kills nits: Rid, Nix, A200, and R&C Shampoo are available at drugstores.

One or two additional treatments may be needed for severe infestation at 7-10 day intervals to kill newly hatched lice.

Application should thoroughly moisten the hair down to the scalp, but it should not be rubbed into the scalp.