

# WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT HEAD LICE



## WHAT ARE HEAD LICE?

Head lice are tiny wingless insects that live on the scalp. They do not carry any diseases so are not a public health risk. Anyone can get head lice.

### NITS

- Nits are eggs that are laid by female louse and are firmly attached to the hair shaft.
- They are about the size of a pinhead and are often found along the forehead, back of the head and behind the ears and are within one cm of the scalp.
- The nits are grayish-white, tan or yellow. Some can be the same colour as hair, making them difficult to see.
- Nits hatch in six to 10 days.

### ADULT LICE

- Lice are the size of a sesame seed and are tan to grayish-white in colour. They may look darker in people with dark hair.
- They need blood to survive and can live up to 30 days on the head but will die within one to two days if they fall off the head.



## HOW ARE HEAD LICE SPREAD?

- Head lice are spread mainly through direct head-to-head contact. When heads are together lice crawl very quickly from one head to another. Lice cannot fly or jump.
- They may also be spread by sharing items such as combs and hats, but this is less common.
- Head lice do not live on animals.



## WHAT DO I LOOK FOR?

- Frequent itching and sores on the scalp from scratching.

**There may be no symptoms. Check all family members for lice by:**

- Using good lighting. Daylight is best, so try sitting by a window.
- Looking through the hair for lice. They can be difficult to see because they are small and hide within the hair and move very quickly.
- Using a magnifying glass and fine toothed comb can help.
- Looking for nits firmly attached to the hair shaft and within one cm of the scalp. Part the hair into small sections and move from one side of the head to the other. Nits can be confused with dandruff or hair spray droplets - they will not fall off if touched.
- Nits will only come off if they are pulled off with your finger nail or a comb.



## TREATING HEAD LICE

Treat only the person who has head lice with a product that kills live lice. Treatment is available from your pharmacy (no prescription needed). Your pharmacist can help you choose a head lice product.

### Always remember to:

- Follow the label directions carefully.
- Avoid use of conditioning shampoo or conditioner before or 48 hours after using head lice treatment.
- Contact your healthcare provider or a pharmacist before using head lice treatment if you are pregnant, breastfeeding have allergies or for a child under two years old.
- Treatment must be repeated again seven to 10 days after first treatment.



### Remove all head lice and nits from hair:

- Use your fingernails to pull off the nits from the hair or use a head lice comb (metal ones work better than plastic). Repeat daily until there are not nits.
- Separate hair into sections, then pick up a few strands at a time to remove the nits.
- Check each section of the head closely before moving on (pay attention to behind the ears, nape of the neck and close to the scalp).



### Treating the home:

- Wash clothing and bedding used by the affected person in the last three days in hot water and dry in a hot dryer.
- Place items that cannot be washed in a sealed bag for two weeks.
- Put all combs, brushes and hair accessories in hot, soapy water.



Do not treat a person with head lice more than two to three times with the same shampoo if it does not seem to be working. Always seek the advice of your healthcare provider if this should happen. They may recommend a different product.

### What about other treatments?

A number of household products such as mayonnaise, petroleum jelly, olive oil, tea tree oil, hair gel and vinegar or wet combing have been suggested as a treatment. These products show little proof of killing head lice and are not as effective as head lice shampoo.



## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### When can my child go back to school?

- Contact your school board or school to find out their policy.
- Note: there is no medical reason to exclude students from school due to head lice.



### Who should I tell when I find head lice? Why should I tell anyone?

- Call your child's school or daycare if you are the one who discovered the lice.
- Tell anyone who may have had contact with your child in the few days before lice was discovered e.g. children at a sleepover, after school activities.
- Telling others will help to identify, treat and prevent further spread of head lice.



### How can I prevent head lice from happening again?

Although you can't prevent head lice altogether, there are some things you can do:

- Check your child's hair every week, so if they get lice, you will see it quickly before there are too many nits.
- Teach your child not to share personal items that are used on their head e.g. comb, hat, headband, barrettes.
- Teach your child to avoid head-to-head contact with others.



## WHAT IF THE TREATMENT DOESN'T SEEM TO BE WORKING?

### Here are a few reasons why the treatment may not have worked:

- It wasn't a head lice infestation.
- The directions for the treatment were not followed carefully. You must apply a second treatment at the right time for the product.
- The product was put on hair that had been washed with conditioning shampoo or rinsed with conditioner. It reduces the effectiveness.
- All of the nits were not removed and some of them lived and hatched.
- It's a re-infestation – your child got head lice right away again.
- The head lice may be resistant to the product you used. Ask your healthcare provider or the pharmacist to suggest another product.



## FOR MORE INFORMATION

### Contact Huron Perth Public Health:

Call: **1-888-221-2133**

Email: **[schoolhealth@hpph.ca](mailto:schoolhealth@hpph.ca)**

### Websites:

Huron Perth Public Health | **[www.hpph.ca](http://www.hpph.ca)**

Canadian Paediatric Society | **[www.caringforkids.cps.ca/handouts/head\\_lice](http://www.caringforkids.cps.ca/handouts/head_lice)**

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention | **[www.cdc.gov/parasites/lice/head](http://www.cdc.gov/parasites/lice/head)**

