

The Vaccinator

A Newsletter of the Communicable Disease Reporting System (CDRS)
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FACTS ABOUT HEAD LICE

- The head louse is a tiny, wingless parasitic insect that lives among human hairs and feeds on extremely small amounts of blood drawn from the scalp.
- Lice (the plural of louse) are a very common problem, especially for kids 3 years to 12 years old (girls more often than boys).
- Lice don't have wings and they cannot fly, jump or swim.
- Lice are not dangerous, however, they are contagious.
- Head lice are about the size of a sesame seed or approximately 1/8 an inch long.
- Most often seen are the eggs (nits) which have been laid by the lice. They are oval and yellow to white in color. An adult louse is tan to grayish-white and may appear darker in persons with dark hair.



Nits on human hair

How do you get Head lice?

- Lice can live on any person's head, regardless of race, age, income, social status or cleanliness.
- Coming in contact with an already infested person is the most common way to get head lice.
- Head-to-head contact is common during play at school and home. This includes sports activities, slumber parties, camp and even playgrounds.



- Wearing clothing, such as hats, scarves, coats, sports uniforms or hair ribbons recently worn by an infested person can also cause lice.
- A less common contact would be lying on a couch, pillow, carpet or stuffed animal that has recently been in contact with an infested person.
- Lice are not passed in swimming pools and cannot swim.
- Lice can be carried on pets for a very short time, however, they cannot feed or live on pets. Pets do not need treated for head lice.
- If one child has lice, check the hair of everyone else in the house.



What are the signs and symptoms of head lice infestation?

- A tickling feeling of something moving in the hair.
- The first sign may be **itching**, which is caused by a reaction to the bites.
- Sores may be on the head caused by scratching. These sores may become infected. If the skin on the scalp is broken or infected contact a doctor.
- Lice or nits may be visible on the hair.

How can I treat a head lice infestation?

- If one or more children are found to have head lice, refer to your facility's lice policy regarding exclusion criteria.
- Refer parent/guardian to the child's primary health care provider for appropriate treatment.
- Provide the parent/caregiver with the following treatment guidelines.
 1. Only treat the hair of persons who have head lice or nits. No preventive treatment is recommended.
 2. Apply any brand of lice-killing hair product, shampoo or crème rinse. Apply the hair product **EXACTLY** according to the package directions. For children less than 2 years of age consult your doctor.
 3. **Remove all the nits.** Nit combs, often found in lice medicine packages, should be used to comb nits and lice from the hair shaft. A good strong lamp or magnifying glass is helpful. Divide hair into sections and look through each section, starting at the scalp and working your way outward. It may take several hours to remove **all** the nits. Check hair every 2-3 days for remaining nits or lice.
 4. Home remedies like mayonnaise, olive oil, kerosene, gasoline or petroleum jelly **ARE NOT** recommended. These remedies may slow the movement of an adult louse; however, they are not effective in removing or killing head lice.

Remember to follow your lice policy, included in your facilities Communicable Disease Manual



Lice Eggs (Nits)

Please contact Columbus Public Health Communicable Disease Team at (614)645-1474 for more information.

Websites

For fact sheets about reportable diseases:

- Columbus Public Health: www.publichealth.columbus.gov
- Columbus and Franklin County Communicable Disease Reporting System or CDRS: www.cdrsinfo.com

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