

Head lice are insects, which live on human hair. Tiny and hard to see, they bite our scalps to feed, irritating the skin and making it itchy. Lice lay eggs (nits) on hair strands close to the scalp. Nits are usually found above and behind the ears, and at the nape of the neck. Unlike dandruff, nits cannot be brushed off. Head lice do not carry disease, nor do they mean your child is dirty. Anyone can be infested. Early treatment can prevent this problem from spreading. After treatment, it is preferred that the nits are removed. Re-infestations are easier to detect if nits from the previous infestation are completely removed. As well, none of the lice shampoos are 100% effective. If a nit survives, one louse can lay up to 350 eggs in 3 weeks. To assist with control, a product called Tea Tree Oil has been reported to be helpful. It is added to shampoo as lice apparently find this repulsive. It can be bought in a health food store.

This is a common problem. If your child has head lice, please do not feel that your home is dirty or that others will judge you. Lice are easily picked up, especially at this time of year.

SUGGESTED TREATMENT FOR HEAD LICE MANAGEMENT

- Wash the hair with usual shampoo and rinse.
- Put a lot of (1/2 cup) inexpensive conditioner on the hair.
- Untangle the hair using a wide-toothed comb; leave the conditioner in.
- Comb the hair with a lice comb (special metal comb available at pharmacies).
- Divide the hair into small sections; for thick hair you will have to divide it into smaller sections.
- Place the teeth of the comb next to the scalp and draw comb down full length of hair.
- If the comb tugs the hair add more conditioner or turn the comb around (usually the lice combs are beveled and combing toward the scalp/hair is more comfortable and pulls less).
- After each stroke, rinse the comb in a sink or bowl of warm water and wipe dry, then check the comb for lice (you don't want to give them a ride back to the head).
- Continue section by section until all hair is combed.

Note: It takes about $\frac{1}{2}$ hour or more to comb the whole head.

If you find live head lice:

- Repeat the above treatment starting with the conditioner.
- Check all other family member's heads (wet and conditioned).
- REPEAT THE SUGGESTED TREATMENT EVERY 3 TO 4 DAYS FOR 2 WEEKS ON THE HEADS THAT HAVE LICE. This will remove the lice as they hatch, and before they are able to mate and move to another head.

If you choose to use a pesticide shampoo, we recommend that you only use one treatment. For re-infestation, use the combing-conditioning treatment described above.

For more information, please contact the local Public Health Unit at 755-3345.