

LICE: INFORMATION FOR PARENTS

Lice

This time of year as the kids are going back to school, some may bring home unwanted guest...Lice! Lice are highly contagious and extremely common. Six to twelve million American children get head lice every year.

The head louse is a tiny, wingless parasitic insect that lives among human hairs and feeds on tiny amounts of blood drawn from the scalp. They can spread quickly from person to person.

“Contrary to common belief, anyone can get head lice,” said Stephanie Armstrong, RN, a registered nurse at Greenvale Pediatrics-Brook Highland. “It doesn’t matter if you’re rich or poor, if you have clean hair or dirty hair—you can get lice,” she said. “Lice aren’t dangerous by they are a nuisance and can be difficult to deal with.”

Symptoms

Some of the symptoms of head lice include itching and scratching. This is due to a reaction to the saliva of lice. Parents many also notice small red bumps or sores from scratching. Also children may complain of feeling like something is moving around on or tickling their heads.

How to identify lice:

If your child is showing symptoms of head like, they should be easy to identify. The lice and nits (eggs) can be seen by the naked eye. “Usually at the nape of the neck or behind the ears there are small eggs that are attached to the hair shaft,” said Armstrong. “They may be white or yellowish brown. They look different than dandruff as dandruff flakes away pretty easily and quickly, while lice eggs are pretty hard to pull out.”

Treatment

Treatment for lice is highly effective. Options include over the counter medicated shampoos as well as more natural shampoos designated for treating lice. Armstrong says the key is to follow directions carefully to avoid recurrence. **Most treatments require a follow up application after 7 to 10 days. This is to kill any newly hatched nits.**

Still, it’s important to keep in mind that lice medication is a pesticide. Applying too much or using it too often can increase the risk of causing harm. Always read the product label carefully and follow directions precisely.

Here are some simply ways to get rid of the lice and their eggs, and help prevent a lice re-infestation:

- Wash all bed linens and clothing that’s been recently worn by anyone in your home who’s infested in very hot water (130°F[54.4°C]), then put them in a hot cycle in the dryer for at least 20 minutes.
- Put anything that can’t be washed (like stuffed animals: in airtight bags for at least 3 days.
- Vacuum carpets and any upholstered furniture (in your home and car), then throw away they vacuum cleaner bag.

- Soak hair care items like combs, brushes, barrettes, hair ties or band and headbands in rubbing alcohol or medicated shampoo for 1 hour. You also can wash them in hot water or just throw them away.

Because lice are easily passed from person to person in the same house, bedmates and infested family members also will need treatment to prevent the lice from coming back.

Prevention

While highly contagious, it's important to remember that lice cannot jump or fly. The only way of transmitting them is by direct contact.

Teach your children to never share combs, brushes, hats, scarves, jackets or headphones.

In addition a popular pastime of young people has become a common lice transmitter, taking selfies. Tell children to avoid any kind of head to head contact.

Lice can be hard to eliminate. If after following every recommendation your child still has lice it could be because:

- Some nits were left behind
- Your child is still being exposed to someone with lice
- The treatment you're using isn't effective

If your child still has lice two weeks after you started treatment or if your child's scalp looks infected, call your doctor. While lice can be a hassle and embarrassing, reassure your child that anyone could get them and what there *is* light at the end of the tunnel. Be patient, follow all instructions carefully, and soon your family will be lice free.