

WHAT ARE HEAD LICE?



Figure 1: Head Louse
Pediculus capitis

Head lice are small, wingless parasitic insects. They are typically 1/6 - 1/8 inches long, brownish in color with darker margins. The claws on the end of each of their legs are well adapted to grasping a hair strand.

Female head lice glue their grayish-white to brown eggs (nits) securely to hair shafts. The eggs are difficult to remove without a special “nit-comb”. The nits are generally near the scalp, but they may be found anywhere on the hair shaft.

A child cannot “catch nits”. Nits (lice eggs) can only be laid by live lice.



Figure 2: Nits (lice eggs)

Interesting Facts on Head Lice

- ♦ Dead lice have been found on Egyptian mummies, Incan princes and North American Indian remains
- ♦ Women of Northern Siberia threw lice at their men as signs of affection



Head lice can affect people of any socio-economic background and ethnicity and they DO NOT imply a lack of cleanliness or hygiene of the affected person.

Overall, head lice are more a nuisance than anything else, although some people do find the discovery of head lice very embarrassing. If you have children it is likely that they will have a case during childhood, but if you have the knowledge and treatments available at home, it can be easily remedied. Remember, ANYONE can get head lice and it's nothing to be ashamed of!



Hanover Public Schools Health Services

HEAD LICE 101: A PARENT'S GUIDE



*Share a toy, share a slide,
share the feelings deep inside,
but never share a hat or comb,
or lice could make your head,
their home!*

HEAD LICE 101:

THE BASICS



- ◆ **DO NOT PANIC!** Head lice are *not* an emergency and, in most cases, do not pose any health risk. However, misuse of pesticides and use of unlabeled treatments (ex: kerosene) *can* pose a health risk.
- ◆ Head lice **CANNOT** live off a human host for more than 24-48 hours. Head lice **CANNOT** live on pets. Head lice **CANNOT** reproduce in carpets, furniture, or other household furnishings.
- ◆ **PESTICIDE SPRAYS DO LITTLE OR NOTHING TO CONTROL LICE.** *NEVER* treat your home, car, furniture, beds, pillows, or clothing with pesticides (e.g. 'lice bombs,' flea bombs, sprays, etc.) in an attempt to control head lice. You will expose yourself and your family to unnecessary pesticide risk.
- ◆ Head lice are very common among people of all socio-economic groups. More than 12 million people, mostly children and school personnel, get head lice per year.
- ◆ Direct head-to-head contact with an infested person is the main way head lice are transmitted, but they may also be transmitted by sharing hats, scarves, headphones, combs, and other hair accessories.
- ◆ If a lice shampoo is warranted, ask your doctor or pharmacist for specifics on the product and **follow *all* label instructions *exactly*.** Misapplications can be ineffective and dangerous.

**LICE CANNOT HOP, JUMP OR FLY,
BUT THEY CAN CRAWL RAPIDLY.**

10 TIPS FOR Treatment

1. Use a medicine that your health care provider or pharmacist recommends. After treatment, removal of nits is necessary.
2. For nit removal, work in a well lit area or use a flashlight or hand lens. 
3. Use a grooming comb or hairbrush to remove tangles. A hair detangle spray or other hair conditioner may aid in this process.
4. Divide the hair into sections and fasten off the hair that is not being worked on.
5. Use a lice comb to detect and remove lice and nits. Or manually remove by pinching the nit and pulling it off the hair shaft.
6. Go through hair sections from the scalp to the end of the hair. Nits are usually found close to the scalp.
7. Dip the comb in a cup of hot, soapy water or use tape to remove  lice, nits, or debris from comb.
8. Move on to the next section until the entire scalp and all hair has been checked.
9. Screen the person every day for 10 days and regularly thereafter.
10. If additional nits (at least 3-5 per day) are discovered, another manual search is recommended.
11. **Please be sure to notify the school nurse if you treat your child.** Students must be checked by school nurse before returning to school after treatment.

**YOU CANNOT COMPLETELY CONTROL
HEAD LICE WITH LICE SHAMPOO ALONE.
YOU MUST COMBINE LICE SHAMPOO
TREATMENT WITH MANUAL REMOVAL.**



HOW TO AVOID A HAIR RAISING EXPERIENCE

- Watch for signs of head lice. Frequent head itching or complaints of itchy head/scalp are common signs. Red bite marks or scratch marks may be seen behind the ears, back of neck and scalp. Check your children every few days if head lice are reported at their school. **Lice are easier to eliminate if caught early.**
- Teach your children not to share hats, headgear, scarves, headphones, and grooming items (combs, hairbrushes, etc.) and to avoid direct head-to-head contact.
- To kill lice on bedding, clothes, etc., wash and dry them as you would ordinarily. **NEVER** add any pesticide. Vacuum materials that cannot be washed.
- If you are concerned about head lice on carpets or furniture, vacuum them thoroughly or wipe smooth surfaces with a damp cloth.
- Place items that cannot be washed or dried, such as stuffed animals, in a tightly sealed plastic trash bag for 10 days. **NEVER** spray items with a pesticide.
- To kill lice on brushes, combs, or hair accessories, wash them with hot, soapy water. **NEVER** spray them with a pesticide.
- Your child may be temporarily excluded from school, but this helps avoid widespread head lice outbreaks.