U.S. Army Center for Health Promotion and Preventive Medicine

Just the Facts

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... About Head Lice

Head lice are tiny insects that live on the scalp. These insects lay eggs, called nits, which stick to hair very close to the scalp. Head lice **do not** spread disease.

Head lice are very common in child care centers because the lice spread easily among children who are together in one place. Head lice **are not spread** because children have not washed properly.

Head lice spread from person to person by direct contact among children or on items such as hats, combs, hairbrushes and headphones. Head lice may or may not make a child's scalp itchy.

There are a number of very effective treatments for head lice. All the treatments contain an insecticide that kills the lice. If a child has head lice, parents can contact their physician or the local Preventive Medicine Service for advice about treatment.

HOW TO DETERMINE IF YOUR CHILD HAS HEAD LICE:

Where to Look —

* Close to the scalp.
* Behind the ears.
* The back of the neck.
* The top of the head.

What to Look For —

* One of the first signs is itching and scratching the head.
* Adult lice - 1/8 inch (1 mm) long - are hard to see.
* The nits (or eggs) are easier to see.
* Nits are **firmly** attached to the hair close to the scalp.
* Nits are grayish white in color and are oval in shape.
* Nits may look like dandruff but they cannot be flicked off.

How to Check —

* Spend a few minutes every week checking your child's head.
* Good lighting is important.
* Look for nits by parting hair in small sections going from one side of the head to the other. Check carefully, looking close to the scalp.

- **Child Care Facilities**
- **Information**
- **Symptoms and Treatment**

For additional information contact your local health consultant or health care provider.

THINGS PARENTS CAN DO:

◆ Check your child's hair for nits immediately, after 1 week, and then again after 2 weeks if another child has head lice.

◆ Do not treat anyone with a head lice product unless you find lice or nits in their hair. All family members (adults and children) must be checked if one member has head lice.

◆ Get a treatment for head lice. A prescription is not needed. Many physicians recommend Kwell® or RID®. These and other new products are the most effective.

◆ Follow the directions on the product. Do not leave the shampoo or rinse in hair longer than directed. Rinse hair well after the treatment.

◆ Remove nits from hair after treatment by running hair strands between your thumb and fingernail. A special comb is also available for removing nits. Put the nits in a bag, tie it up and throw it out.

◆ Consult your physician about whether to repeat the treatment or what other steps to take if live lice or new nits are found at least 7 days after the first treatment.

◆ If anyone in your family has head lice, do the following on the same day that you give the treatment:

* Collect all clothes, towels and bed linens used by the person with head lice in the last 2 days. Wash these items in hot water and dry in a dryer at the hottest setting.

* Dry-clean clothes that cannot be washed, or put these clothes in a clothes dryer at the hottest setting for at least 20 minutes. Nonwashable items should be put in a sealed plastic bag for 2 weeks.

* Put pillows and nonwashable furry toys in a clothes dryer at the hottest setting for at least 20 minutes.

* Clean combs and brushes by soaking them overnight in the head lice treatment. Never share combs, brushes or hats.

* Vacuum carpets, mattresses, upholstered furniture and car seats thoroughly.

* Check all family members daily for the next 2 weeks.

* Avoid using insecticide sprays to get rid of lice; they may be harmful to people and pets.

◆ If your child has head lice, treatment must be given before he or she returns to the child care facility. The physician must clear the child before he or she returns to the facility.

◆ Consider establishing a regular routine of checking your children for nits. This could be done, for example, when shampooing hair.

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