



Head Lice Information for Schools

This information package designed for schools to photocopy and distribute as needed.

Concerns about head lice will arise in all school settings. Head lice, although mainly a nuisance, pose little risk to health. **Anyone** can get head lice. Head lice are not related to a lack of cleanliness; in fact they are more often attracted to a clean scalp.

An important sign to look for is children who scratch their heads frequently. If you suspect a child has head lice, please contact the child's parents (who may then contact HEALTHLink Alberta toll free at 1-866-408-5465 or their local Community Health Centre).

It is recommended that the **Parent Awareness Letter** be used at the beginning of the school year to remind parents to check their child's head frequently during the year for head lice. Also included are a **Parent Letter** and **Fact Sheet for Parents** that can be sent home with all children who attend classes where head lice are found. Fact Sheets for Teachers and Staff are also included.

Head lice tend to provoke strong emotional responses. It is important that children who have head lice are **not** isolated or treated differently. Emphasize to all children that they should **not** share combs, brushes, barrettes, hats, scarves, earmuffs, headphones, helmets, etc. If you have any further questions or concerns, please contact HEALTHLink Alberta toll free at 1-866-408-5465 or the public health nurse assigned to your school.

FACTS ABOUT HEAD LICE FOR STAFF

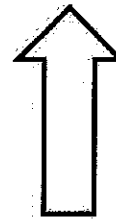
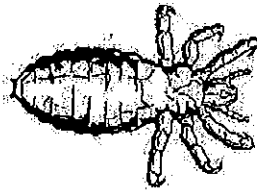
(Source – Canadian Paediatric Society Statement 1996 - Reaffirmed February 2003)

1. Head lice can infest anyone regardless of social class or level of personal cleanliness.
2. Head lice rarely survive off of the human head for longer than 36 hours.
3. Head lice do not carry other human diseases or cause serious illness.
4. Head lice, body lice, and pubic lice are different and have different disease risks.
5. Many people, especially adults, have no symptoms when they have head lice. All close personal contacts, such as household members, need to be carefully checked and treated if infested.
6. Improper use or accidental swallowing of treatment products can be dangerous. Follow the directions for use carefully. Treatment products are poisonous if swallowed or overused.
7. Head lice are sensitive to treatments. Unhatched eggs are more likely to survive treatment.
8. After the first treatment, a second treatment 7 to 10 days later is needed to kill any head lice that hatched from eggs not killed by the first treatment.
9. Household spraying has not been proven to help in controlling head lice. The side effects of spraying insecticides may be harmful to family and pets.
10. There is no data proving that a "no nit" policy helps in controlling head lice. Removal of nits is done solely for esthetic reasons. It is far more common that an **untreated** child who is unaware of carrying head lice will re-introduce it back into the school.
11. Despite the availability of modern chemical treatments and community/school based eradication programs, head lice are still a common problem in Canada.
12. It is estimated that 1-10% of Canadian elementary school children have head lice at any time.
13. Transmission of head lice is mainly by direct head to head contact. Head lice rarely survive longer than 36 hours off the human head.
14. It is true that scratching itchy bites can lead to breaks in the skin, and secondary skin infections and gland swelling, but head lice do not spread other diseases.
15. Chemical treatment appears to be the only satisfactory method for getting rid of head lice.
16. If live head lice are detected by inspection 24 to 48 hours after the initial treatment, **immediately** re-treat with a different product. A second application with the effective treatment is recommended 7 days later.
17. Most over the counter treatments for head lice are chemicals, and are therefore **toxic** products. Parents must be reminded to store these products out of the reach of young children, and no product should be applied to open sores or locally infected skin. Parents should use a product only as directed by carefully following package directions.
18. Contacts of the child infested with head lice, including family members, schoolmates and daycare centre contacts, should be examined and treated if infested. Bedmates should always be treated.

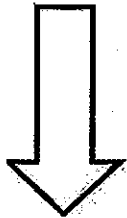
For Staff
When Dealing With A Child Infested with Head Lice:
Keep the "Emotional Response " to a Minimum

Children don't usually have the same emotional response to lice as adults

Be cautious of the words /body language used when identifying a child who has head lice



Lice are usually spread through head to head contact and may be spread through objects that touch heads (toques, combs, barrettes, headphones, etc.)



Lice are nuisances but do not pose a health risk

Lice cannot jump or fly

Dear Parent or Guardian,

Re: Head Lice

Recently some cases of head lice have been found in the school/class your child attends. Parents of students that require treatment have been contacted. In order to prevent future recurrences, we suggest that you observe your child and family for lice.

We recommend that you inspect your child's head on a regular basis for lice and nits. Information on the attached sheet explains what to look for and how to treat head lice if present.

Lice can be easily transmitted from one person to another. Remember, **ANYONE** can get head lice. Please take a few minutes now to check your child/children for head lice and to talk them about how to avoid getting lice.

Tips to pass on to your children:

- Don't share personal grooming items (brushes, combs, hair barrettes etc...)
- Don't share towels, headphones, sleeping bags, hats, scarves, pillows and stuffed animals.
- Use your own hangers at school. Do not leave clothes in piles – clothes that are piled stay warm and lice can move freely in the pile
- Children with long hair should consider tying or braiding it, especially now as lice is occurring in their school.

For further information contact Health Link Alberta at 1-866408-LINK (5465), or a local public health nurse.

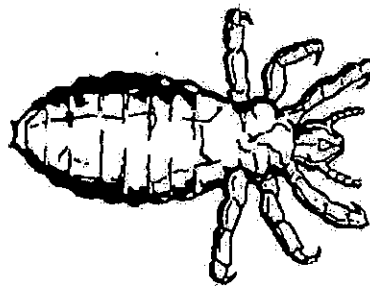
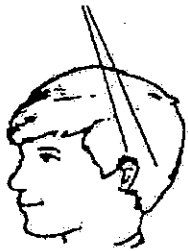
Sincerely,

Facts About Head Lice for Parents

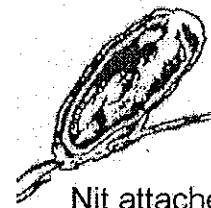
How to Recognize Head Lice:

Adult head lice are tiny wingless insects, oval in shape and brownish in color. They are about the size of a sesame seed with six legs (with claws so they can cling to hair). Lice cannot fly or jump. Adult lice live close to the skin on the head and lay their eggs (nits) on the hair shafts, often at the nape of the neck or behind the ears. Nits are grayish white in colour and oval shaped. The oval eggs are firmly attached to the hair close to the scalp. Nits may look like dandruff but cannot flick off or be washed off with ordinary shampoo. Nits take 7-10 days to hatch. The new lice come out of the nits and feed off the scalp or move onto new hair. In 10-14 days they become mature lice. Mature lice live about 20 days and can lay 4 or more eggs per day. When the eggs hatch in 7 to 10 days they leave an empty shell that sticks to the hair shaft. As the hair grows about 1 cm a month, the nit moves further from the scalp. Nits that are **not** near the scalp are empty eggs and are not a source of new lice. The presence of head lice on the scalp may cause irritation and itchiness.

Common sites for head lice



Adult head louse



Nit attached to hair shaft

How Lice are Spread:

Lice are spread by direct contact with someone who has them (**head to head**) or by direct contact with items such as combs, brushes. Hats, earphones, pillows, clothes and towels **may** also be sources of head lice. Head lice can only survive 1 to 2 days away from the human body. Head lice live only on humans. They do not come from animals like cats or dogs. They do not spread disease. Having head lice is **not** a sign of being unclean.

How To Treat Head Lice:

Step 1:

Several over-the-counter treatments are available. These products contain insecticide that kills the lice. Your pharmacist can help you choose a product. It is important to apply the product according to the package instructions. Some products recommend washing hair first with ordinary shampoo, do not use shampoo with conditioner or apply conditioner. Most products must be applied to dry hair. It is important to check package instructions before use. Do not

leave the product in the hair longer than the package recommends.

Check all family members for head lice and treat everyone in the house who has lice at the same time. Do **not** treat anyone with head lice products if they do not have lice. **Children 2 years or under or pregnant women should not be treated with lice shampoo. Do not use lice treatments on open sores or infected skin.**

Step 2:

24 to 48 hours after treatment check hair and scalp for the presence of live lice. If no live lice are present re-treat in 7 to 10 days with the same product used in Step 1. If live lice are found 24 to 48 hours after the initial treatment proceed to Step 3.

Step 3:

If there are live lice 24 to 48 hours after initial treatment, re-treat with a different over-the-counter head lice product. Your pharmacist can help you choose a second product. Check for live lice again in 24 to 48 hours. If no live lice are found then re-treat with the second product 7 to 10 days later. If live lice or new nits are found within 7 days of the second treatment consult your physician.

Other Things To Do:

- Soak or wash all combs, brushes, barrettes and hair accessories in hot soapy water for ten minutes. Make sure hair is removed from them.
- Bedding, scarves, hats and coats can be washed in the washing machine.
- Vacuum mattresses, pillows, and rugs.
- Stuffed animals, headgear and other items that cannot be washed can be stored in plastic bags for 10 days
- **The use of lice sprays is unnecessary.**

Prevention:

Discourage children from using other people's belongings i.e. combs, brushes, etc. Tie long hair back or keep it in braids when lice outbreaks occur in the school. Check your children periodically throughout the school year periodically for lice.