

PEDICULOSIS (HEAD LICE)

Background

The Division recognizes the concern represented by the transmission of pediculosis in schools and therefore encourages close communication between school staff, parents and public health nurses regarding the detection and resolution of instances of pediculosis. Lice are not a sign of being “unclean” or having poor hygiene. Care will be taken to protect the individual from undue invasion of privacy.

Head Lice – General Overview

- Lice are small insects that live and breed on the scalp.
- Lice are a nuisance; not a health hazard.
- Head lice are not dangerous and they do not spread disease.
- Lice can and do spread from person to person.
- Lice do not live on cats, dogs and other animals.
- Both adults and children can be infected.
- Short hair does not prevent infection.
- Lice do not jump or fly.
- Infections can be caught anywhere, not just at school, thus head lice are a community problem not just a school problem

Procedures

1. School staff, students and parents/guardians shall be provided information on head lice identification, prevention, and treatment on a regular basis (at least in the October and January Newsletters) rather than just during an outbreak. This information to be communicated is from Alberta Health Services called **“Head Lice: Who’s Responsibility Are They?”**
2. Students and/or staff with head lice shall be supported in a confidential, non-judgmental manner.
3. When school personnel become aware of a student with head lice, they (using telephone contact) will notify the parent/guardian indicating it is in everyone’s best interest for the lice to be treated before the child continues with regular activities which includes attending school.
4. Each school is assigned a Public Health Nurse who can be contacted by the school administration for more information.
5. A detection and treatment program link as recommended by Alberta Health Services shall be provided to the parent/guardian if parents ask for direction and help.



6. The student shall NOT be removed from regular classes upon detection of head lice but physical contact and sharing of hats, helmets, hair combs, or scarves should be discontinued as part of the regular education process. However, parents/guardians should be contacted as per Article 3 above.
7. Alert letters to other parents will NOT be sent home from the school.
8. Schools may wish to send a cover letter home for parents/guardians, along with Alberta Health Services information (including detection combing, treatment, prevention, etc.) on Head Lice as provided to the school from their Public Health nurse.
9. School personnel shall NOT participate in the detection combing on students.

Reference: Section 18, 20, 45, 60, 61, 113, School Act
Alberta Health Services



Head Lice

What Are Head Lice?

Head lice, or the medical condition known as pediculosis, are a pesky problem that anyone can have at some point in their life. Most often infestations occur in children 3 to 11 years of age.

Head lice are not dangerous and they do not spread disease but they can and do spread from person to person. Having dirty hair does not cause head lice.

Head lice cannot fly or jump and you cannot get them from your pets.

While they may be **found anywhere on the head**, they prefer to live on the scalp along the neckline and behind the ears. When lice bite the scalp they cause itching.

How Do I Know If My Child Has Head Lice?

Children may say they have a tickling feeling on their head or may be very itchy on their scalp.

It can take up to 4-6 weeks for a person to experience itching.

The only way to be sure a person has an active case of lice is to find live lice.

Lice are not easy to see and can be hard to find. They are about the size of a sesame seed. They are usually greyish white or brown.

Nits are small, oval and blend into the color of the hair. Each nit is firmly attached to a hair. They cannot be washed out or flicked off like dandruff. Finding nits does not mean the individual has a current infestation and they should not be treated based on finding nits.



Head louse



Louse egg (nit) on hair

How Do I Check for Lice?

Detection combing is the recommended method to check for head lice.

Detection combing is an organized examination of the hair, from the scalp outwards, to find head lice. Finding lice by parting the hair and looking at the scalp is not particularly efficient and likely to miss many infestations

Can My Child Attend School?

When parents discover that their child has head lice it is in everyone's best interest for the lice to be treated before the child continues with regular activities

Things to remember.....

- Head lice do not spread disease
- Children can have head lice for several weeks with no symptoms.
- The presence of nits indicates a past infestation that may not be currently active
- Cases of head lice are often misdiagnosed

How can you prevent the spread of head lice?

Teach your children how head lice are spread (by direct contact with the head of someone with an infestation) and to avoid this kind of activity.

It is a good idea to teach your children not to share brushes, combs or head gear such as hats, bandanas, etc.

It is also a good idea to braid or tie back long hair.

Check your child's head for live lice once a week all year long.

What is the Treatment for Head Lice?

- Health Canada recommends treatment with a topical insecticide (pyrethrins, permethrin 1% or lindane) or a non-insecticidal product called Resultz® (for use in individuals 4 years of age and older). These products are available over the counter at drug stores.
- Tell the pharmacist if anyone needing treatment is pregnant, breastfeeding, under 6 years of age, has allergies or a serious health problem.
- **It is very important to read and follow the package directions carefully.** Some products recommend that there should not be Crème Rinse or Conditioner on the hair, as it may prevent the treatment from working
- Each product is different and has detailed directions for use. For example one product might say it should be put on dry hair while another should be put on wet hair. Each will say how long it should be left on the hair before rinsing out.
- Avoid unnecessary contact with the product since it can be absorbed through the skin.
- The treatment course for each of these products involves an initial application followed by a second application in 7 to 10 days as per the manufacturer's recommendations.
- Most approved treatments will kill the lice, but are not effective against the nits.
- A second treatment in 7 to 10 days will kill the lice that have hatched since the first treatment before they are mature enough to lay new eggs.
- Check the heads of anyone who was treated daily for 3 weeks after the first treatment
- The presence of nits indicates a past infestation that may not be active.
- Public Health does recommend removal of nits within 1 ½ inches of the scalp to ease in identification of re-infestation
- If live lice are found on the head 24 to 48 hours after the treatment, contact your pharmacist or public health nurse for advice.
- **DO NOT treat unless you are sure that you have found a living, moving louse**

Do Other Treatments Work?

Many home recipes and products sold in stores are based on mixtures of essential oils (eucalyptus, lavender, tea tree, etc), salts or other natural substances. Some people have used oils like mayonnaise, olive oil and Vaseline or hair gels to try to smother lice.

Public Health does not recommend any of these products as there is no proof that they work.

I Keep Treating My Child But He/She Keeps Getting Head Lice. Why?

The following are several common reasons why treatment for head lice may fail:

- Applying the treatment to hair that has been washed with conditioning shampoo or rinsed with hair conditioner
- Insufficient application of pediculicide (the treatment)
- Re-infestation
- Resistance of the head lice to the treatment used
- Lack of removal of live nits that are within 1 ½ inch (3.81 cm) of scalp
- Misdiagnosis: Children can scratch for 2 or more weeks after treatment or other objects in the hair (dandruff or hair spray droplets etc) can be misidentified as lice

What Cleaning Needs To Be Done?

Lice cannot live for more than 2-3 days away from the scalp so excessive cleaning is not necessary.

Choose the best method to clean the following items (washing in hot water for 15 minutes or running through a drier on the hottest setting):

- All personal hair care items such as combs, barrettes, etc. Repeat this daily until the lice are gone.
- Items that have been in prolonged or intimate contact with the child's head (bedding, hats, etc.) at the time of first treatment.

Items that cannot be washed should be placed in a sealed plastic bag for two weeks, or placed in the freezer for 48 hours at -10° C. (to prevent any eggs from hatching)

There is no need to vacuum or wash floors, carpets or furniture. Do not use household sprays or lice sprays. They do not work and may be harmful to people.

**For more information contact:
your local Public Health Office
or your Physician
or Health Link Alberta 1-866-408-5465**