

HEAD LICE



There are eight to ten million cases of head lice in our country per year. Three quarters of head lice infestations are school children less than 12 years old.

If someone in your family has lice, don't panic or feel embarrassed. It is not a sign of lack of cleanliness and it is an easily treated condition.

Lice hatch from eggs called nits. Nits are extremely tiny, yellowish or grayish white and teardrop shaped. They attach to the hair shaft and will not wash out or blow away. They must be combed out of the hair with a special comb designed for this purpose. Lice hatch in about one week and are fully mature in seven to ten days.

Live lice can be difficult to locate because they move so quickly and don't like bright light. But their nits are easier to see. Closely examine the scalp in natural light and look for these eggs attached to the hair shaft. Also, look under children's fingernails.

Head lice are reddish brown and wingless. Adults do not fly or jump from one person to another. They can only crawl. They are usually passed from child to child through shared combs, hats and other personal items.

A symptom of head lice is itching. If you see your child repeatedly scratching, you should look for lice. When infestation is low, head lice are usually found in the hair above the ears and on the back of the scalp. If left untreated, they may be found on other parts of the head including the entire scalp and eyelashes. Scratching can result in a secondary infection.

Treatment for lice can be purchased over the counter and normal advice is to treat once and repeat seven days later.

Lice can survive for up to two days off the human scalp on personal items and household surfaces, clothing or bed linens. Soak all washable items in hot (about 150 degrees F) water for five to ten minutes. Wash clothing and linens in hot water (about 130 degrees F) and then place the clothes in a hot dryer for twenty minutes. Place all non-washable items in a tightly sealed plastic bag for two weeks, then open outdoors and shake vigorously. Lice control spray is also available at your local pharmacy that will kill lice and their eggs on mattresses, sofas and carpeting.

ATTENTION: This web page is intended to be used for health information ONLY. If you or a family member has a medical emergency, please call your doctor or 911, or your local emergency service number.