

## Head Lice Facts

Head lice are flat, wingless insects that can not fly or jump. Head lice feed only on human blood and can only live on human hair. Female head lice lay 3-10 nits (eggs) per day in their 30 day lifespan. The nits are laid very near the scalp and attach themselves with a cement like substance to the hair shaft. Viable nits are usually found within ¼ inch from the scalp; found usually at the nape of the neck and around the ears but can be found anywhere on the head.

The life cycle of head lice is: nit (yellow, tan or grayish white in color, tear drop or oval shape. The nymph has 3 stages; it is transparent until its first meal then turns brownish red. A nymph needs to eat within 5 hours of hatching to survive. They burrow into the scalp to feed off of blood and lay waste (one of the reasons for the intense itch). Another reason for the itching is an allergic reaction to the anticoagulant saliva of the head louse. It takes 7-12 days for the nymph to develop into an adult before the female can lay nits. At the adult stage they look like a bug, they are tan or brownish in color. Adult head lice can only live off a host for 12 – 15 hours.

Head lice are transferred by direct contact (responsible for most cases) or indirect transfer (sharing of objects that had contact with infected hair; brushes, hair pieces, wigs, coats, hats, bedding, etc).

### **Do's and Don'ts:**

**Do** treat with a pediculicide (none are better than another, generic is just as good as name brand). **Do** re-treat the hair 7-10 days after initial treatment. **Do** remove all the nits from the child's hair. You will need to pick them out with your fingers. They can not be combed or brushed out. Suggestions to loosen nits: vinegar water rinse after shampoo or fabric softener rinse (**do not** do this before a treatment because it may decrease the absorption of the medication). **Do** use a hair dryer, the heat of the dryer helps with the nits. Another suggestion is to use products with tea tree oil, for some reason lice shy away from this substance.

**Do not** treat with lice shampoo more than once every 7-10 days; also **do not** use the same lice shampoo more than 3 times in a row (means it is not effective). **Do not** treat children under the age of 2. **Do not** re-wash hair for 1-days after treatment. **Do not** mix lice killing medications in a single treatment. **Do** check the infested person every 1-2 days for at least two weeks until all signs of the infestation are gone; finding a nit or two the next day or so does not necessarily mean reinfestation. **Do** make it a routine to check your child's hair on a regular basis.

**Do** call school and also family and friends that have close personal contact.

**Do** treat the home environment. All clothing worn within the previous 4 days and bedding needs to be washed in hot water and dried in the dryer for at least 20 minutes. If unable to wash an article, you can put in the dryer (130 degrees) for 20 minutes. Vacuum all upholstered / carpeted areas that your child has had contact with (chairs, couches, car

seats, etc.). Other articles like stuffed toys can be bagged for 10 days. Combs, brushes, etc. should be immersed in water hotter than 130 degrees, Lysol, rubbing alcohol or pediculicide for one hour.

These suggestions should get most people through the process. If there are several re-infestations please call the school for more information. 326-0503 ext. 3264.