

**HEALTH SERVICES****GUIDELINES FOR THE PREVENTION AND CONTROL OF HEAD LICE**

1. **WHAT ARE HEAD LICE?** A small wingless insect that infects the scalp of both children and adults. They are only about 1/30<sup>th</sup> of an inch long and have a life cycle of 30-35 days. During this time a female will lay approximately 90 to 150 eggs (nits). They are attached to the hair shafts on the back of the head, around the ears and nape of the neck. In 7 to 9 days the eggs will hatch and the immature lice will reach maturity, ready to mate and start the life cycle over.
2. **TRANSMISSION – HOW DO LICE GET FROM ONE PERSON TO ANOTHER?**
  - a. Directly: through direct contact with an infected person’s head/hair (example – children playing closely together).
  - b. Indirectly: by placing the clothing of an infected child with the clothing of an uninfected child (example – lice will travel from one piece of clothing to another in search of a new host (victim) by crawling. LICE DO NOT HOP OR FLY.
  - c. Indirectly: by sharing personal items such as combs, hair brushes, hats, earphones, etc.
3. **SIGNS OF INFESTATION** – Head lice are hard to see but some signs to look for include:
  - a. Scratching the head or back of the neck
  - b. White specks in the hair. Look for whitish eggs, which can be mistaken for dandruff. Dandruff is easily removed but nits (eggs) are glued to the hair shaft and are difficult to remove.
4. **TREATMENT** – Use an approved head lice treatment as directed. Family members should also be treated. **PRECAUTION:** Prior to treatment of children two (2) years old or younger or pregnant women, check with your private physician or health clinic for special instructions.
  - a. Apply medicated product. Follow directions on the label. The shampoo kills the lice and some nits in four (4) minutes, but **does not remove the nits.**
  - b. Rinse the hair with warm water.
  - c. To help loosen nits, pour a solution of ½ vinegar and ½ warm water over the hair. Wrap the head with a towel and allow to remain for 20 minutes.
  - d. Rinse hair thoroughly with warm water. Use an electric hair dryer at the warmest setting. Following the shampoo, nits must be pulled out with fingernails. Part the hair into small sections to remove the nits. **Nit removal is essential for successful treatment.** A gooseneck lamp or natural sunlight will aid in the detection of nits.

**WHAT ELSE SHOULD BE DONE:** Head lice will live off the body for about 48 hours. Nits will live until they hatch. This could be several days. The following steps are equally as important as the treatment:

  1. Wash all clothes worn by infested individual over the past three (3) days in **hot**, soapy water. It is preferred that you dry your laundry in a clothes dryer on the **hot** setting, but if you are unable to do this, hang laundry on a clothesline in direct sunshine. Any clothes that cannot be washed should be dry-cleaned or placed in a tightly sealed plastic bag for two (2) weeks.
  2. Bedding should also be washed in **hot**, soapy water.
  3. Personal items such as combs, brushes, hair ribbons, etc. should be soaked in a mixture of **hot** water and medicated lice shampoo for ten (10) minutes.
  4. Vacuum all furniture, rugs, mattresses, pillows and stuffed animals. When finished vacuuming, seal the vacuum bag tightly in a plastic bag and remove from the house. Car upholstery must also be vacuumed. When completed, seal vacuum cleaner bag tightly in a plastic bag and dispose of properly.