



Public Health
Prevent. Promote. Protect.

Board of Health

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WHAT IS HEAD LICE?

HEAD LICE CAN HAPPEN TO ANYONE:

Getting head lice is not as bad as you may think. It is not a sign of uncleanliness, or poor health habits. It is not limited to the poor, or to certain racial or ethnic groups. Head lice can occur at any age, and to either sex. It doesn't just affect "other people"...it could happen to you or your family. So it's wise to learn how to recognize head lice, how to treat it, and how to prevent it from coming back.

WHAT ARE HEAD LICE?

These tiny insects live in human hair. They hatch from small eggs, called nits, which are attached to the base of individual hairs. The eggs/nits hatch in about 10 days, with the new lice reaching maturity in about two weeks. The female louse can live for 20 to 30 days, and can lay as many as six eggs/nits a day. Since lice multiply fast, they should be treated.

HOW DOES SOMEONE GET HEAD LICE?

Head lice can be transmitted in a number of ways besides direct physical contact. Borrowing a comb or brush from a person who has lice will do it. So can borrowing hats, ribbons, scarves or other head coverings. **Don't share towels, pillows, hats, coats, scarves, helmets, headphones, or stuffed animals can spread head lice. HEAD LICE DO NOT JUMP OR FLY! You can NOT get lice from animals.**

WHAT SIGNS SHOULD I LOOK FOR?

Persistent itching of the head and back of the neck can indicate head lice. You should also look for infected scratch marks or a rash on the scalp. Most important of all, look for nits attached to individual hairs. These can be seen with the naked eye. Sometimes, small white specks in the hair such as dandruff or droplets of hair spray can be confused with nits. Try removing the specks from the hair shaft. Dandruff or hair spray will come off easily—nits are very difficult to remove.

TREATING HEAD LICE: THE SOONER THE BETTER

Once head lice is found, the problem should be taken care of promptly in order to prevent it from spreading to others. Fortunately, the head does not need to be shaved in order to bring the problem under control. The head lice shampoo can be purchased over the counter or by prescription. Whatever you use, **FOLLOW DIRECTIONS ON BOTTLE.**

SHOULD OTHER FAMILY MEMBERS BE CHECKED FOR HEAD LICE?

Yes. If one member of your family has head lice, all family members should be inspected periodically for two weeks if lice or nits are found, they should be treated promptly.

HOW CAN I HELP PREVENT HEAD LICE IN THE FUTURE?

All family members should avoid sharing or borrowing personal items—combs, brushes, hats, towels or clothing—from each other or from friends.

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