



## LINCOLN COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT

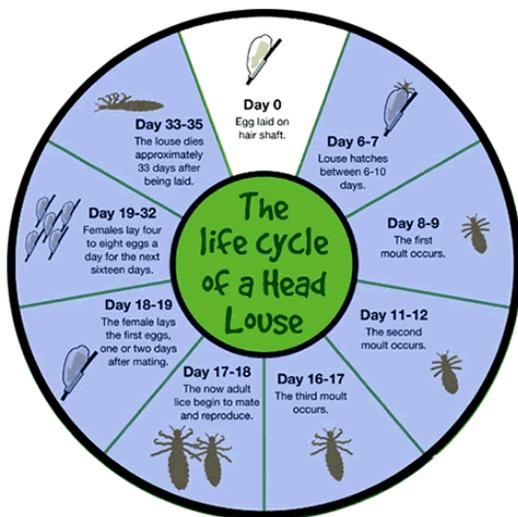
### HEAD LICE (PEDICULOSIS) INFORMATION

Head lice is a very common condition. It is estimated that between 6 and 12 million infestations occur each year. Head lice are a nuisance, but do not carry germs or spread disease.

#### HEAD LICE FACTS

- Nits are head lice eggs. Nits are oval and may be light gray, white, or light yellow in color.
- Nits must be laid by live lice. You cannot "catch nits."
- Nits are hard to see and are often confused with dandruff or hair spray droplets. When they are laid, they are "glued" to the hair shaft near the scalp, so they cannot be brushed aside, like dandruff.
- Head lice are clear in color when hatched, then quickly develop a reddish-brown color after feeding.
- Head lice are about the size of sesame seeds.
- Head lice have six legs equipped with claws to grasp the hair.
- Head lice are crawling insects. They cannot hop, jump, or fly.
- Pets do not carry human head lice.
- Head lice do not spread disease.
- Anyone can get head lice.

#### HEAD LICE LIFE CYCLE



- Head lice need human blood in order to survive.
- The adult female head louse lays eggs (nits) which she "glues" to the hair shaft near the root of scalp.
- The young lice hatch approximately 6-10 days later and must feed within 24 hours.
- The head louse will reach maturity and become capable of reproduction in 2-3 weeks.
- Head lice live for approximately 30 days on a host and a female louse may lay up to 100 eggs (nits) during this time.
- In most cases, a head louse will not survive off a human host for more than 24-36 hours.
- Nits can survive for up to 10 days off a human host.

Head lice survive less than 1-2 days if they fall off a person and cannot feed; nits cannot hatch and usually die within a week if they are not kept at the same temperature as that found close to the scalp.

#### TRANSMISSION: HOW DO YOU GET HEAD LICE?

Lice (not nits) are directly transferred from one person to another:

- Head to head contact; very common in young children
- Direct contact with hair, such as washing, styling or playing with someone's hair
- Contact with lice-infested clothing, upholstery, pillows, bedding, brushes, combs, hair clips, wigs, hats, scarves, helmets, etc.
- Lice do not have wings, and they do not hop, jump, or fly.
- Lice do not live on plants, pets, or other animals, although they may be transferred from one person to another on a pet.

## WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF LICE INFESTATION?

- Persistent itching of the scalp is the most common symptom, although lice may be in the hair for weeks without an infested person experiencing itching.
- A red “rash” or red/infected marks on the skin may be present in areas where there has been a lot of scratching. (often the nape of the neck, or behind the ears)
- Nits may be seen upon close inspection, attached to individual hairs close to the scalp.
- In severe cases, lymph glands in the neck or under the arms may be swollen. This may indicate infection and the medical provider should be contacted.

HOW DO YOU GET RID OF HEAD LICE? Diligence is the key to dealing with head lice.

There are FOUR KEY PARTS to successful lice eradication:

### 1. TREATMENT OF THE AFFECTED PERSONS (See LCHD Lice Treatment Summary)

The most effective treatments for head lice are OTC (Over-the-counter) or prescription lotions and shampoos made from Malathion, Pyrethrins, Permethrins, Lindane and other insecticides.

- Apply lice treatment, (pediculicide) according to the instructions contained in the box or printed on the label. Pay special attention to instructions on the label or in the box regarding whether the treatment should be applied to dry hair, how long the treatment should be left on the hair and how it should be washed out.

Alternative Lice Treatments: These include strategies such as suffocants, (petroleum jelly (Vaseline®), mayonnaise, or vegetable or olive oil), and tea tree oil. Their effectiveness has not been proven. People often use alternative treatments when conventional treatments haven't worked, or when there is a concern about the toxicity of using head lice control products repeatedly.

### 2. REMOVAL OF LICE AND NITS FROM THE HAIR:

Instruct client and those living with client on how to examine and remove live lice and nits from hair daily until re-treatment, and at least 3X/week for 2 weeks after second treatment.

- Use a comb or hair brush to remove tangles, make sure combs and brushes are cleaned before using again. (See environmental interventions, below.)
- To aid in the removal of nits, the hair should be wet. If a treatment shampoo has been used, hair can be soaked in a 50% white vinegar/water solution followed by application of a damp towel soaked in the same solution for 30-60 minutes to aid in nit removal. (Do not use vinegar solution after using NIX crème rinse; NIX coats the hair and the vinegar may interfere with this.)
- Divide the hair into sections and separate with clips.
- If using a nit removal comb, go through a section of hair starting at the scalp and proceeding to the end of the hair shaft. Wipe the comb with a tissue between sections to remove any lice, nits, or other debris. Discard the tissue.
- If using your fingernail to remove nits, pull nit down hair shaft to end of hair and stick nit onto a piece of scotch tape with sticky side up on an adjacent surface.
- If the nits are difficult to remove, you may use a safety scissors to snip off the individual hair strands with attached nits.
- Head lice can be caught using tweezers, your fingernails, or can be stuck with scotch tape.
- Clip the section of hair that you have finished screening and go to the next section of hair until all sections have been completed.

3. TREATMENT OF THE ENVIRONMENT: There is no need to spend a lot of money on special cleaning products that promise to eradicate head lice. A good vacuum cleaner and washer/dryer are the two most important cleaning tools needed. Head lice do not survive long if they fall off a person and cannot feed.

- All clothing recently worn, bed linens, (including sheets, blankets, mattress pads and bedspreads), towels, jackets, hats, scarves, etc. must be washed in hot water and dried in the dryer.
- Clothing and items that are not washable can be dry-cleaned **OR** sealed in a plastic bag and stored for 7-10 days.
- Combs, brushes, hair clips, barrettes, etc. should be cleaned by removing all hair, then immersing in a pan of water that has been brought to a boil, and taken off the stove, for 10-15 minutes. Follow with washing in hot soapy water and rinsing well. (To remove debris, use an old toothbrush to clean the comb tines and discard the toothbrush after use.)
- Vacuum the floor and furniture, particularly where the infested person sat or lay. Vacuum pillows, mattresses, furniture, carpets and car interiors. Wipe vinyl furniture with hot water.
- Do not use fumigant sprays or fogs; they are not necessary to control head lice and can be toxic if inhaled or absorbed through the skin

#### 4. PREVENTION OF RE-INFESTATION:

Head lice are spread most commonly by direct head-to-head (hair-to-hair) contact. However, much less frequently, they are spread by sharing clothing or belongings onto which lice have crawled or nits attached to shed hairs may have fallen. The risk of getting infested by a louse that has fallen onto a carpet or furniture is very small. Head lice survive less than 1-2 days if they fall off a person and cannot feed; nits cannot hatch and usually die within a week if they are not kept at the same temperature as that found close to the scalp.

These steps can be taken to help prevent and control the spread of head lice:

- Avoid head-to-head (hair-to-hair) contact during play and other activities at home, school, and elsewhere (sports activities, playground, slumber parties, camp).
- Do not share clothing such as hats, scarves, coats, jackets, sports uniforms, or combs, brushes, hair ribbons, barrettes, or other hair appliances/ personal items.
- Do not share combs, brushes, or towels. Disinfest combs and brushes used by an infested person by soaking them in hot water (at least 130°F) for 5-10 minutes.
- Do not lie on beds, couches, pillows, carpets, or stuffed animals that have recently been in contact with an infested person.

It is important to be well-informed about the most current recommendations for treating head lice. Credible resources to check include:

1. The National Pediculosis Society: [www.headlice.org](http://www.headlice.org)
2. The American Academy of Pediatrics (PEDIATRICS, Volume 126, Number 2, August 2010, "Clinical Report – Head Lice", The Council on School Health And Committee on Infectious Disease)
3. Wisconsin Division of Public Health, Department of Health Services, Disease Fact Sheet Series, "Pediculosis (head lice infestation)
4. The National Association of School Nurses (NASN) Position Statement: "Pediculosis Management in the School Setting", Adopted: 1999; Revised: 2004, 2011
5. The Centers for Disease Control (CDC): [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)