



## LINCOLN COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT

### HEAD LICE TREATMENT SUMMARY

The stigma of head lice sometimes leads parents to attempt dangerous, inappropriate methods of treatment, ranging from acetone, bleach and WD-40 to loosen eggs from the hair, to dousing their children's scalps with gasoline. Some parents resort to shaving their children's heads – an effective option for getting rid of lice and their eggs, but traumatic, nonetheless.

#### **The most effective treatments for head lice are thought to be Pediculocides.**

- These are insecticides and can be dangerous if they are misused or overused. Not only do some of these insecticides cause minor rashes and skin irritations in some people, but some are also known to be toxic to the nervous and immune systems, especially if over-used.
- FDA-approved pediculocides are available by prescription, or non-prescription (over-the-counter).
- Because some product failure has been reported with each type of insecticide, new methods of treatment are emerging steadily.
- Pediculocides are not recommended for children under 2 years of age.

No treatment is completely successful at killing the nits (eggs); repeated screening and combing are vital to getting rid of nits and head lice. Regardless of the method of treatment used, ultimately, it will always be the "parent power" behind the effort that makes the difference.

#### TYPES OF TREATMENT FOR HEAD LICE

##### Non-Prescription Medications

1. Permethrin (Nix)
2. Pyrethrin (RID, R & C, A-200 Pyrinate)

##### Prescription Medications

1. Malathion (Ovide)
2. Lindane (Kwell)
3. Benzyl alcohol 5% lotion (Ulesfia)
4. Ivermectin 0.5% lotion (Sklice)

##### Alternative Head Lice Treatment Strategies

Because there is little scientific information to support the effectiveness of these methods, *The Lincoln County Health Department cannot recommend these treatments:*

1. Suffocants: applied to hair, then covered with towel or shower cap for 8-12 hours.
  - Petroleum jelly (Vaseline®)
  - Mayonnaise
  - Oil (vegetable, olive, or mineral)
2. Tea tree oil (added to shampoos) has been used preventatively and as a lice treatment. Lice Shield Shampoo and Conditioner in one contains natural essential oils of eucalyptus, citronella, rosemary, and lemongrass meant to repel lice without hurting scalp.

## GENERAL GUIDELINES FOR HEAD LICE TREATMENT

### **WHAT TO DO:**

- ✓ Before applying treatment, it may be helpful to remove clothing that can become wet or stained during treatment. (Removed clothing should be washed.)
- ✓ Apply lice treatment according to the instructions contained in the box or printed on the label. Pay special attention to:
  - Whether the treatment should be applied to dry hair or wet (shampooed/rinsed) hair
  - How long the treatment should be left on the hair
  - How the treatment should be washed out
  - Whether more product might be needed if a person has very long or thick hair
- ✓ Following treatment, use a clean towel to dry hair, and put on clean clothes. The treated person(s) could then sit in a chair, under a good source of light, and another person can begin removing lice and nits. Nits may be removed with fingernails or by using a fine-toothed comb. The treated person(s) should sleep in a clean bed that night.
- ✓ If live, active lice are still found 8-10 hours after treatment, there may have been resistance to the treatment. Re-treat with another type of OTC treatment, or contact medical provider for a prescription treatment and guidance.
- ✓ After treatment, check the hair and use fingernails or a nit comb to remove nits and lice every day for a week. Continue to check every 2-3 days for the following 2-3 weeks to be sure all lice and nits are gone.
- ✓ Follow the instructions regarding the need to re-treat. Re-treatment is usually recommended, but not with all treatments. To be most effective, re-treatment should occur on day 7-9, after all eggs have hatched but before new eggs are produced.
- ✓ For persistent infestations, refer to medical provider.

### **WHAT NOT TO DO:**

- Do not use a combination shampoo/conditioner, or conditioner before or immediately after using lice treatment.
- Do not use oil treatments (vaseline, olive oil, hot oil treatments etc.) immediately before or after using lice treatment. (Oil-based products may enhance lice treatment absorption.)
- Do not treat children under two years old with lice treatment; instruct parent to contact medical provider for instruction.
- Do not use more than the recommended amount of lice treatment. (Unless directions indicate that more treatment should be used for very long or thick hair, or unless MD recommends more.)
- Do not mix pediculocide medications in a single lice treatment.
- Do not re-wash the hair for 1-2 days after treatment.
- Do not treat an infested person more than 2-3 times with the same medication if it does not seem to be working. This may be caused by using the medicine incorrectly or by resistance to the medicine. Always seek the advice of your health care provider if this should happen. He/she may recommend an alternative medication.