

Several cases of head lice have recently been detected in a third grade class. Head lice is a common occurrence among school-age children. Cleanliness and personal hygiene are not linked to contracting head lice. It is spread through direct contact and the sharing of personal items such as brushes, combs, and hats. A louse is a reddish-brown parasite approximately the size of a sesame seed that can live up to thirty-six hours on an inanimate object (ex. jacket collar). Since lice can spread so easily, I am asking you to thoroughly check your child's head for lice TODAY and to continue checking frequently for the next several weeks.

The best way to check for lice is to have your child sit in direct sunlight, or under a bright lamp, for 5 – 10 minutes while you part the hair in small sections. You should look for tiny egg sacks (nits) at the base of the hair shaft, approximately 1/8" to 1/4" away from the scalp. Nits are grayish-white eggs most frequently found in the crown of the scalp, behind the ears, and in the nape of the neck. Unlike dry skin, nits are tear-shaped and positioned off to one side on the hair shaft. They adhere to the hair and cannot be flicked off but need to be removed by hand (or preferably by using a nit comb if available). Live lice are more difficult to find as they scatter in light.

The treatment for eliminating lice consists of a two step process involving the use of a pediculicidal shampoo and nit removal. No treatment can get around the need for the painstaking manual removal of nits. Also treatment of personal articles and the environment is necessary. All washable clothing and linens must be washed in hot water and dried in a hot dryer. Careful vacuuming of rugs, furniture, car seats and mattresses is necessary. Combs, brushes, etc... can be boiled or soaked in lice shampoo for one hour. Articles that cannot be washed or dried, (ie: stuffed animals), can be sealed in a plastic bag for one month.

The initial shampoo treatment will kill most of the lice, but additional efforts will be required to remove all of the eggs. This requires patient combing and pulling the egg sacks off the hair shaft. Covering the hair with olive oil for several hours and then attempting to remove lice and nits has been helpful as well. The oil will not kill any lice but it will certainly slow them down to make detection and removal somewhat easier. Also combing the hair when it is wet helps to expedite the process.

As a safeguard, girls with long hair should have it tied back and/or braided and sprayed with hair spray if possible to deter the lice from easily getting

into the hair. Boys are advised to wear hair gel. Children should be instructed not to share personal items and jackets should not be placed in piles in the classroom or out at recess. Constant attention to the problem by all will help create a lice- free environment.

Please feel free to call me if you have any questions, and be sure to notify me if you find lice or nits on your child.

Sincerely,

Jan Coleman
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