

Qvhd-TIPS

A FAMILY HEALTH LETTER

Volume 28, No. 1

MAY 2014



OH NO! NOT LICE!



Striking “fear” in the hearts of parents is the dreaded note home from school that says your child has lice! Immediately, you feel itchy and you know what lies ahead: vacuuming, washing, and shampooing! Lice are not a parent’s worst nightmare, but they are a huge nuisance. This issue of Qvhd-TIPS Family Health Letter is dedicated to helping you through this event.

ABOUT LICE

Lice are tiny insects that can live on different parts of the body. Head lice are the most common lice seen in schools. In fact, children get head lice more than teenagers or adults. Despite some old wives tales, anyone can get lice. You could call them “equal opportunity bugs” because they have no preference for a person’s color, ethnicity or lifestyle and will create a home on whoever is accessible. They do not carry diseases, but they can cause discomfort, itching, skin irritation and stress. Having lice does not mean you or your child is ill or unclean, nor does it reflect on the kind of parent you are.



WHERE DO LICE COME FROM?

Lice are in our environment and will continue to live and breed as long as they have a host. Kids in schools get head lice almost as frequently as they get colds. Lice can be transferred from person to person through hats, scarves, hair fasteners, headphones, sharing a locker or cubbyhole, pillowcases, bedding, clothing or towels used by an infected person. Contrary to popular belief, lice do not hop, jump or fly but can crawl from child to child anytime children are close together.

LICE LESSONS: DO'S

- Only use FDA (Food and Drug Administration) approved products for treatment of lice.
- Follow the directions EXACTLY as stated on the package.
- After treatment, comb out the nits left in your child’s hair with a special nit comb.

WHAT IS A NIT?

There are live lice and there are nits. The nits are the lice eggs. They are very tiny and oval-shaped. They can be yellow to white in color. Sometimes they resemble dandruff, but do not come off a hair shank as easily as dandruff. They have a waterproof, glue-like substance that helps them to stick to the hair shaft, which is why they are hard to remove.

LICE LESSONS: DON'TS

- Do not use a conditioner or shampoo/conditioner product before applying lice medication.
- Do not re-wash the hair for 1-2 days after the lice medicine is removed.
- Do not use poisons or flammable liquids like gasoline, kerosene, paint thinner or insect repellent on your child.
- Hair dryers are not an effective way to kill lice eggs and could cause burns.
- Hair gels, hairspray, oils and other non-medicated hair products including dandruff shampoo will not kill lice or prevent eggs from hatching or sticking to hair.
- Shaved heads do not get rid of lice. Lice can stick to short and newly grown-in hair.
- Do not apply extra amounts of any lice medication unless instructed to do so by your physician and pharmacist. The drugs used to treat lice are insecticides and can be dangerous if they are misused or overused.
- All the medications used for treatment should be kept out of the eyes. If they get onto the eyes, they should be immediately flushed away.
- 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.
- Do not use different head lice drugs at the same time unless instructed to do so by your physician and pharmacist.

The information in this issue of Qvhd-TIPS is from the Centers for Disease Control, The Texas Department of State Health Services and the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Division of the Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources.

THE TREATMENT PROCESS

TREATING THE PERSON

The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) recommends:

- Remove clothing that can become wet or stained during treatment.
- Apply lice medicine according to the instructions supplied with the product. Pay attention to how long the medication should be left on the hair and how it should be washed out.
- Note: If the person with lice has very long hair (longer than shoulder length), it may be necessary to use a second bottle.
- After treatment, the infected person should put on clean clothing.

Check other family members for signs of lice. If there is evidence of lice, treat all those persons at the same time. Some experts believe bedmates of an infested person should also be treated even if they do not show signs of infestation.

DID IT WORK? If a few live lice are still found 8-12 hours after treatment but are moving more slowly than before, do not retreat. The medicine may take longer to kill all the lice. Comb dead and any remaining live lice out of the hair using a fine-toothed nit comb (or some styles of flea combs used for animals.) However, if after 8-12 hours after treatment there are not dead lice and they seem as active as before, the medicine may not be working. Call your health care provider to ask about re-treatment. You may need a different product.

TREATING THE ENVIRONMENT (But don't make yourself crazy!)

The CDC notes that you can use housekeeping measures combined with medicine treatment. However, they note that such additional measures are generally not required to eliminate a head lice infestation. The most critical action for eliminating lice is the medical treatment of the infected person.

- Hats, scarves, pillow cases, bedding clothing and towels worn or used by the infested person in the 2-day period just before treatment can be washed in hot water and heat-dried. Lice eggs are killed by exposure for 5 minutes to temperatures greater than 128.3 degrees F.
- If you cannot launder an item, it can be dry-cleaned or sealed in a plastic bag for two weeks.
- Vacuuming furniture and floors can remove an infested person's hairs that might have nits attached.
- Soak combs and brushes in hot water (at least 130 degrees F) for 5-10 minutes.

(This information was taken from <http://www.cdc.gov/parasites/lice/head/treatment.html>)



COMBING IS CRITICAL!

After the shampooing process comes the combing process. This is a VERY important part of ridding the head of the lice. Nits (eggs) attach to hair strands as if they are almost glued to the shaft. A very fine toothed comb will help pull the nits out. Special combs are made for this process. Metal combs may be more efficient at removing the nits. (Flea combs without chemicals in them might also work.)

Combing should be done in a well-lighted area. The hair should be wet. Place a disposable cloth around the child. Comb small sections of hair at a time. (Hair clips will help to section off hair.) Clean the comb frequently as you go with a tissue and/or soapy water. Flush the dirty tissue to dispose of dead lice and nits.

Parents get upset (understandably) when their child gets re-infested and often blames the school environment. However, many experts believe that the re-infestation is often a result of not thoroughly combing the hair after treatment.

COMBING REQUIRES PATIENCE.
COMBING IS TIME-CONSUMING!

COMMON QUESTIONS ABOUT HEAD LICE straight from the CDC* to you! (The answers may surprise you.)

Is infestation with head lice reportable to health departments?

Most health departments do not require reporting of head lice infestation. However, it may be beneficial for the sake of others to share information with school nurses, parents of classmates, and others about contact with head lice.

Is mayonnaise effective for treating head lice?

CDC does not have clear scientific evidence to determine if suffocation of head lice with mayonnaise, olive oil, margarine, butter, or similar substances is an effective form of treatment.

Do head lice spread disease?

Head lice should not be considered as a medical or public health hazard. Head lice are not known to spread disease. Head lice can be an annoyance because their presence may cause itching and loss of sleep. Sometimes the itching can lead to excessive scratching that can sometimes increase the chance of a secondary skin infection.

Can head lice be spread by sharing sports helmets or headphones?

Head lice are spread most commonly by direct contact with the hair of an infested person. Spread by contact with inanimate objects and personal belongings may occur but is very uncommon. Head lice feet are specially adapted for holding onto human hair. Head lice would have difficulty attaching firmly to smooth or slippery surfaces like plastic, metal, polished synthetic leathers, and other similar materials.

Can wigs or hairpieces spread lice?

Head lice and their eggs (nits) soon perish if separated from their human host. Adult head lice can live only a day or so off the human head without blood for feeding. Nymphs (young head lice) can live only for several hours without feeding on a human. Nits (head lice eggs) generally die within a week away from their human host and cannot hatch at a temperature lower than that close to the human scalp. For these reasons, the risk of transmission of head lice from a wig or other hairpiece is extremely small, particularly if the wig or hairpiece has not been worn within the preceding 48 hours by someone who is actively infested with live head lice.

Should I use household sprays to kill lice or have my house fumigated by a pest control company?

No. Using fumigant sprays or fogs is NOT recommended. Fumigant sprays and fogs can be toxic if inhaled or absorbed through the skin and they are not necessary to control head lice. Routine house cleaning, including vacuuming of carpeting, rugs, furniture, car seats, and other fabric covered items, as well as laundering of linens and clothing worn or used by the infested person is sufficient. Only items that have been in contact with the head of the infested person in the 48 hours before treatment need be considered for cleaning.

Can swimming spread lice?

Data show that head lice can survive under water for several hours but are unlikely to be spread by the water in a swimming pool. Head lice have been seen to hold tightly to human hair and not let go when submerged under water. Chlorine levels found in pool water do not kill head lice. Head lice may be spread by sharing towels or other items that have been in contact with an infested person's hair, although such spread is uncommon. Children should be taught not to share towels, hairbrushes, and similar items either at poolside or in the changing room. Swimming or washing the hair within 1-2 days after treatment with some head lice medicines might make some treatments less effective. Seek the advice of your health care provider or health department if you have questions.

Do pets play a role in lice transmission?

Dogs, cats, and other pets do not play a role in the spread of head lice.

How did my child get head lice?

Head-to-head contact with an already infested person is the most common way to get head lice. Head-to-head contact is common during play at school, at home, and elsewhere (sports activities, playground, slumber parties, camp).

Although uncommon, head lice can be spread by sharing clothing or belongings. This happens when lice crawl, or nits attached to shed hair hatch, and get on the shared clothing or belongings. Examples include:

- sharing clothing (hats, scarves, coats, sports uniforms) or articles (hair ribbons, barrettes, combs, brushes, towels, stuffed animals) recently worn or used by an infested person;
- or lying on a bed, couch, pillow, or carpet that has recently been in contact with an infested person.

PREVENTION TIPS

TEACH YOUR CHILD TO NEVER SHARE THINGS THAT TOUCH THE HEAD!

This includes combs, hair accessories, hats, helmets for all sports, scarves, towels and even ear buds.



Schools may at times report a head lice infestation so that parents can take preventive measures with their families. If this happens, take these actions as soon as possible:

- Look in your child's hair for small white nits, the eggs of lice.
- Inspect your child's clothes—particularly hats, shirts, scarves, and coats—that have been worn during the past 48 hours, looking for lice and eggs.
- Check household items that are more likely to get infested with lice and their eggs, such as towels, bedding, and rugs.
- Be sure your child knows the importance of not sharing any items that touch the head or ears.
- Explain to your child what lice are and that they should avoid touching heads with other children until the school has contained the problem.

(<http://www.aad.org/dermatology-a-to-z/diseases-and-treatments/e---h/head-lice/tips>)

When it is known that head lice are present in a community, parents are encouraged to check their children's heads for lice on a regular basis throughout the year. **FAMILIES SHOULD NOT DEPEND ON SOMEONE ELSE TO CHECK A CHILD'S HEAD – THIS MAY DELAY TREATMENT.** Remember, if one person in a family, camp, or school has head lice, there's a chance others will too. Check everyone, and use the same treatment, if necessary.

(<http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/idepc/diseases/headlice/factsheet.pdf>)



<http://news.bbc.co.uk/cbbcnews/>



<http://www.nwkidsmagazine.com/2011/11/hey-head-lice-those-kids-alone/>

Qvhd-Tips, a family health letter, is a publication of the Quinnipiac Valley Health District, 1151 Hartford Turnpike, North Haven, CT 06473. Telephone: 203 248-4528. Web address: www.qvhd.org

Author: V. Deborah Culligan. The content provided in this health letter is intended to provide you with current health information to assist you in making health decisions. **It is not intended to be legal or medical advice or a substitute for recommendations made by your health care provider.**