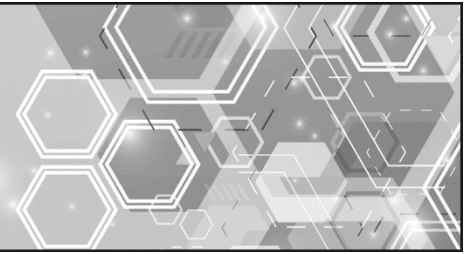




Durham Region Health Department **Facts about...**



Pediculosis (Head Lice)

What is it?

Head lice are tiny insects that live on the scalp of humans. Head lice can be found on the hair very close to the scalp, eyebrows, and eyelashes. The saliva from head lice may cause itching. Head lice are a nuisance, but rarely cause health problems. They have nothing to do with lack of cleanliness.

How is it spread?

Anyone can get head lice. They are very common among school-aged children or children attending day care. Transmission usually occurs by direct head-to-head (hair-to-hair) contact with the hair of an infected person or through indirect contact from items such as shared hats, combs, hairbrushes, pillowcases and towels. Lice cannot fly or hop, but they crawl very quickly. Head lice do not live on pets, such as cats and dogs.

What do I look for?

- The first symptoms are itching and scratching of the head. Some people do not itch at all.
- Scratch marks may be seen on the neck and scalp and may look like a rash.
- Adult lice are greyish brown in colour and the size of a sesame seed. They move fast and are hard to see.
- Lice eggs (nits) are easily seen and will be firmly attached to the hair shaft close to the scalp.
- Nits are greyish white in colour and oval in shape.
- Nits may look like dandruff but are not easily removed.
- Nits hatch in 7-10 days and lice can survive for 1-2 days away from the scalp.

Where to look and how to check:

- Wet the hair.
- Comb the hair with a lice removal comb (small fine-toothed comb, available at a local drugstore).
- Submerge the comb into a white bowl of water.
- Look for lice at the bottom of the bowl; nits may also be seen floating in the bowl.
- Examine the hair near the scalp as nits may be stuck to the hair shaft.
- Live lice may be seen in the hair, especially near the ears and neckline.
- Check all household members.

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How is it treated?

- Treating head lice may require two treatments, applied about 1 week apart, to kill newly hatched lice.
- After the second treatment, check the head every 2 to 3 days for 2 to 3 weeks to ensure all lice and nits are gone.
- Head lice products can be purchased without a prescription at the drugstore. It is important to use the product as directed.
- Treatments are generally safe but for children under 2, those with allergies or women pregnant or breastfeeding, it is best to check with your health care provider or pharmacist.
- Treat all those affected in your household at the same time.
- If your child has head lice, be sure that their school or day care is aware so that the parents can check their children. Also, tell the parents of your child's playmates.
- Wash bedding, clothing and personal items in hot water for 20 minutes and dry in a hot dryer. The heat of the water or a hot drying cycle will kill any live lice and nits.
- Personal items (such as stuffed toys) that cannot be exposed to heat should be dry-cleaned or stored in air-tight plastic bags for 2 weeks.
- Children with head lice should be treated and then attend school or childcare as usual.

How can I protect myself?

- Teach children not to share combs, brushes, hair accessories, hats and headphones.
- Talk to your child about avoiding head-to-head (hair-to-hair) contact.
- Long hair should be tied in a ponytail.

November 8, 2023

