

## What are Head Lice (Pediculosis)?



Head lice are tiny grey to brown insects about the size of a sesame seed that live in human hair and must feed on human blood to live. Though they can't fly or jump, these tiny parasites have specially adapted claws that allow them to crawl or cling firmly to hair. They lay tiny white oval-shaped eggs about the size of a knot of thread, called "nits" that lice glue to each strand of hair close to the scalp. Although it is hard to see head lice, a person can see the nits if they look closely. Nits are most often found in the hair behind the ears and at the back of the head and neck. The first sign of lice is itching of the head which is caused by the bite of the head lice. Head lice aren't dangerous and they don't spread disease but they are a nuisance!

## How Did My Child Get Head Lice?

Head lice can be transmitted in several ways --playing "head-to-head", or sharing personal items such as combs, hairbrushes, hats, ribbons, scarves, or other head coverings. Kids are most prone to catching lice because they tend to have close physical contact with each other and often share personal items. Any child can get head lice. Personal cleanliness does not prevent a person from getting head lice.

## Help! How Do We Get Rid of It?

1. Since head lice multiply rapidly, treatment should occur promptly. Use an over-the-counter FDA-approved shampoo treatment available at the pharmacy or grocery store. Follow the directions on the packaging exactly.
2. Remove as many nits as possible with a special nit comb that comes with the head lice treatment. Comb daily. Nit removal is never easy but it is the most important and vital step. One remaining nit (egg) that hatches will result in live lice causing a re-infestation.
3. Treat your home at the same time you treat your child. Do the following:
  - Soak combs and brushes in some of the lice shampoo for 1 hour; or in very, very hot water for 5-10 minutes.
  - Wash sheets, blankets and other bedding in the hottest setting of water in the washing machine.
  - Dry-clean non-washable items; or seal these items in a plastic bag for a week.
  - Vacuum furniture, carpets, and mattresses thoroughly.
4. Treat hair a second time after 7-10 days (or follow the manufacturer of the lice treatment's instructions) to make sure that you kill any lice that may have hatched from nits that might have been missed during the combing, before they lay eggs.
5. There is no need to cut hair. Lice like to crawl on short hair just as much as long hair and they need the same amount of treatment.

## Does My Child Have To Be Excluded From School?

**NO.** According to Texas Law, a child should not be excluded from school if live lice are found in their hair. Parents are encouraged to treat their child's hair as soon as possible. The school nurse will be able to recheck your child's hair upon returning to school if you so desire.

## How Do We Keep Lice From Coming Back?

Follow the steps listed above exactly. Teach your whole family about how lice is spread and treated. It is important that you teach your child not to share combs, brushes and other personal items with other children. Check your child's hair from time to time (daily is preferred) for signs of lice, catching it early can cut down on the number of treatments, save time, and money.

Please don't hesitate to contact the campus school nurse should you have any questions.