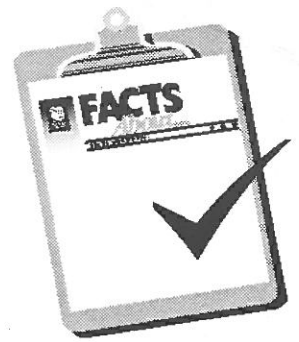




FACTS

About...



HEALTH DEPARTMENT

PEDICULOSIS (HEAD LICE)

What is it?

Head lice are tiny insects that live on the hair of the head. Adult lice can live on the head for up to 10 days and in those 10 days a female can produce 50-150 eggs (nits). The nits stick to the shaft of the hair 3-4mm from the scalp. Head lice are a nuisance, but rarely cause health problems. They won't cause sickness or death. They have nothing to do with lack of cleanliness.

How is it spread?

Anyone can get head lice. School children are more likely to get them because they are in head-to-head contact more often than adults. Parents can get them from close contact with their children. You cannot get head lice from pets. Head lice do not live on dogs, cats or other animals, only humans.

What do I look for?

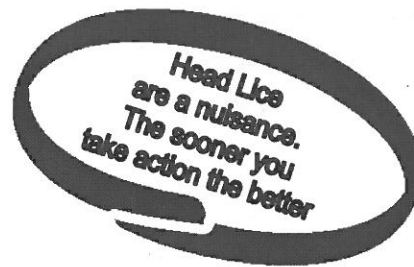
- The first symptoms are itching and scratching of the head
- Scratch marks may be seen on the neck and scalp and may look like a rash
- Adult lice are 1-3 mm long, grayish-brown in colour and hard to see. They crawl quickly from one person's head to another. They do not jump or fly
- The nits are easily seen and are firmly attached to the hair close to the scalp
- Nits are grayish-white in colour and oval in shape
- Nits may look like dandruff but cannot be flicked off

Where to look and how to check:

- Look for nits by parting the hair in small sections, going from one side of the head to the other
- Check the hair thoroughly, especially close to the scalp
- Look closely behind the ears and around the nape of the neck
- Look also at the top of the head and eyebrows
- Good lighting is important (natural light may help you see them better)
- Check all family members

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For more information
DURHAM REGION HEALTH DEPARTMENT
905-668-7711 1-800-841-2729 or www.durham.ca



How is it treated?

The sooner you take action the better. Treating head lice requires two treatments, 7-10 days apart, to kill newly hatched lice. After the second treatment, check the head twice a week for four weeks to make sure all lice are gone. **DO NOT TREAT ANYONE UNLESS YOU FIND LICE OR NITS IN THEIR HAIR.** Head lice shampoo, cream rinse, or lotion can be purchased without a prescription at the drugstore. It is important to use the product as **directed**. Ensure total coverage of the scalp. Sometimes head lice resist one product. If live lice are found 24 hours after the first treatment try another product followed by the second treatment 7-10 days later.

Although nit removal is not essential, removing nits after treatment helps make it easier to see new infestations. To help remove nits, mix one tablespoon of vinegar in one cup of water and apply to hair. Nits can be removed by running hair strands between your thumb and fingernail. Put the nits in a plastic bag, tie it up and discard. Wash your hands with soap and water afterwards.

Follow-up of all close contacts is very important in order to avoid further spread and re-infestation. Check all family members immediately, then weekly for four weeks. Treat all those affected at the same time. If your child has head lice, be sure that his/her school or day care and children's group is aware so that the parents can check their children. Also, tell the parents of your child's playmates.

Extra house cleaning is not needed. However, you should wash bedding, headgear, towels and clothing used within the last couple of days in hot water. The heat of the water or a hot drying cycle will kill any live lice and nits.

How can I protect myself?

- Remember that an untreated source among close contacts is a common reason for infestation
- Encourage children to avoid sharing headgear such as helmets and hats and to use their own comb and brush (remember this when school pictures are being taken)
- Check your child's head weekly for lice and act quickly if you find any
- Children with long hair should have their hair tied back. Keeping hair short will not prevent head lice
- If your child has head lice, tell the school/day care and parents of your child's playmates

June 7, 2006