

Welcome back to school after a fast summer! Unfortunately, the dreaded problem of HEAD LICE seems to be synonymous with the beginning of the new school year! I would like to enlist your help as head lice detectives. If your student complains about excessive head itching, having lumps behind the ears or having someone noticing white flakes or bugs in his/her hair, it is a good chance that the child has the dreaded HEAD LICE!

First there are some misconceptions that I need to explain. Head lice are host specific. They are only passed from one human being to another. Pets can not spread head lice! Head lice live in clean hair as well as dirty hair. Years ago it was thought that only dirty persons had head lice. NOT TRUE! Head lice also do not care how much money a person has, they only want people who have hair, be it long or short and are not bald! Home remedies such as vinegar rinses DO NOT KILL the lice or nits.

Lice are transmitted from one person to another by sharing hats, scarves, combs, hair brushes, coats, bedding or close head to head contact. Head lice must be contracted and passed from one human to another!

How will I know if my child has head lice? Due to the bloodsucking of the lice, the first and major symptom is intense itching and scratching of the scalp, especially at the nape of the neck and behind the ears. If one looks closely, one can see the small, silvery egg (nit) cases attached to individual hairs. There is also a possibility that the actual louse can be seen if enough time has elapsed. The nits cement themselves to the hair shaft and are almost impossible to remove by just a normal combing or shampooing. If your child displays any of these symptoms, please check his or her hair. If any evidence of lice is found, use the special lice killing formula shampoo, rinse or foam. Follow the directions on the package carefully. It is a good idea to use gloves when using the preparation, a separate towel for each person being treated and do not use while in the person is in the bathtub or shower. The student must be free of both the head lice and nits before returning to school. A special nit removal comb must be used with the treatment. A regular comb will not remove the nits. In most of the over-the-counter preparations, a special comb is enclosed. If that comb is not strong enough for your child's hair, a metal nit comb can be purchased separately.

Head lice are a shared condition. If one member of a family has the

problem, it is very possible that others may also have head lice. Each family member needs to be checked and treated if any evidence is found. The shampoos kill the lice or nits. They do not prevent head lice.

If your child has head lice, you can either purchase an over-the-counter treatment or contact your doctor for a prescription. These preparations are to be used correctly but not overused! Most treatments are to be left on the hair for 10 minutes and rinsed out thoroughly. The treatment is also to be repeated in 7-10 days. If you have any questions, either contact your pharmacist or me.

People do not get ill from head lice but it can be very difficult and troublesome to control. If your child has head lice, as a courtesy, please contact the school and his/her friends. If head lice are detected at school, a note will be sent home with your child. Your child must be treated before coming back to school. Before they return to school, they must be "NIT FREE". Please send the label or name of the preparation you used to school with your student.

Lice exposed clothes need to be washed in as hot water as possible or dry cleaned if non-washable. The carpets need to be vacuumed as well as the furniture, mattress and stuffed toys. Anything that has come in contact with the infected person's head, neck or shoulders must be cleaned. This also includes sheets, pillows, blankets and any other bedding.

With the cooperation and every one working together, hopefully head lice will not become an epidemic. Thank you for your cooperation.

Rachel Wells, RN School Nurse