



## HEAD LICE HELPFUL HINTS

### What do head lice look like?

Head lice are tiny insects that are light grey to brown in color. They lay their tiny white or light colored eggs (nits) on the hair shaft, close to the head. The nits are tear-shaped and unlike dandruff, they adhere tightly to the hair shaft and are not easily removed. They are not caused by lack of cleanliness.

### How to get rid of head lice.

Effective control of head lice requires adequate treatment of the infested individual, household and other contacts, personal articles, and home environment.

### How to do the head lice treatment.

Head lice are not dislodged by water, regular shampoo, or dandruff shampoo. Several products, to kill the lice are available. Some non-prescription shampoos are not to be used by individuals **allergic to ragweed**, therefore consult physician or pharmacist for alternative treatment. Also, if **pregnant or nursing women and children under 2 years old** need to be treated, they should contact a physician for a safe treatment.

Some products require a medical prescription; others can be obtained over-the-counter at a pharmacy. Examples of some products available are listed by the following pediculicide ingredient:

- 1% Permethrin
- Pyrethrin
- 0.5% Malathion
- 1% Lindane – requires a physician order

Alternative treatments are natural remedies for treating head lice infestations. None of these treatments has been scientifically evaluated for their effectiveness in killing head lice. The use of the following alternative treatments on persons who fail to respond to lice medicines, should be discussed with a health care provider prior to beginning treatment:

- Tub butter, mayonnaise (regular not light or fat-free), olive oil, petroleum jelly (Vaseline®) will theoretically smother lice and nits however removal of these products from the hair may be difficult. Grease-cutting shampoos or dish soap may work.
- Hair dryers theoretically will kill lice by generating heat, but no documentation exists to support this method.

The following products may be unsafe for use on humans and are **strongly discouraged**:

- Kerosene, gasoline, alcohol, bleach: **Dangerous!** In addition to being flammable, can be toxic if absorbed through the skin or inhaled and may dry the scalp leading to infection.
- Animal shampoo can contain active ingredients that have not had safety testing done for humans.
- Shower caps, plastic wraps act as an occlusive dressing, should not be used in combination with pediculicides.

### Doing the head lice treatment:

- Change the clothing *before* and *after* the treatment.
- Wash the hair with a shampoo that *does not* contain a conditioner or a cream rinse. Any coating on the hair makes the medication less effective.
- If using medicated shampoo, apply to *dry or almost dry* hair. If using medicated cream rinse, apply to towel dried hair.

- **Follow the label directions for the medication exactly.** Do not use more or less medication than recommended and leave the medication on the exact length of time stated in the label directions.
- Repeat medication in 7-10 days. This is to kill lice that hatch from nits not destroyed by initial treatment.
- If you are treating several people, you may wish to wear protective gloves.
- Do not re-wash the hair for 1-2 days.
- Do not use the medication more than once every 7 days. Remove live lice and eggs by hand.

#### **What to do after head lice treatment is done:**

- Lice medication kills lice but not *all the nits (eggs)*. Nits will remain on hair and **must** be removed daily.
- Suggested methods for removal include fine-tooth combs, attaching gauze to teeth of combs, or using fingernails to pull off nits.
- A vinegar rinse of approximately ¼ cup of white vinegar to 2 cups lukewarm water applied to treated hair for 30-60 minutes may help loosen nits during combing.
- Other products specifically formulated to make it easier to remove lice eggs (nits) from the hair can be purchased over-the-counter. Consult your pharmacist.
- Recheck the head daily for head lice, using a good light or sunlight, for 2 weeks after the second treatment *if indicated by directions on the product.*

#### **What can be done to prevent the spread of head lice:**

- Check everyone in the household for lice, especially young children and bed-mates.
- Everyone with lice or nits/eggs **MUST** be *treated on the same day*.
- Only persons with lice or nits/eggs need to be retreated in 7-10 days if indicated by product directions.
- Be sure to notify friends, extended family, other social contact, and the school of the lice infestation. If contacts are infested and not treated, the lice infestation can reoccur.

#### **How to clean the environment and personal articles to prevent the spread of lice:**

- Lice and nits/eggs are sensitive to heat and cold.
- All clothing, head gear, barrettes, brushes and combs, towels, bed linen, and stuffed toys used by the person with head lice or nits/eggs, within 2 days before diagnosis must be cleaned by the following methods:
  - Clean washable items by hand or by machine in water hotter than 130 degrees Fahrenheit with laundry detergent and dry at least 20 minutes in the dryer on the hottest setting
  - Items that cannot be washed can be treated by one of the following methods:
    - a. Dry cleaning
    - b. Vacuuming thoroughly
    - c. Sealing in plastic bags for 10 days
    - d. Placing in the freezer for 24 hours
  - Soak combs and brushes in 2% Lysol solution (2 tablespoons Lysol per 1 quart water), rubbing alcohol or a pediculicide (a lice killing product) for 1 hour, or immerse in water hotter than 130 degrees for 1 hour.
  - Thoroughly vacuum upholstered furniture, carpet, mattresses, pillows, car upholstery and car seats.
  - Spraying or fogging homes with insecticides or lice killing sprays is *not recommended*.

If lice infestation persists beyond the 2<sup>nd</sup> treatment, please contact your physician and/or call the:

**Waukesha County Public Health Center  
262-896-8430**