

Take a peek...Every Week!!

It's that time of the year again, children are getting ready to go back to school and life gets back to a routine for the next several months. For many parents, this means evening rituals of packing lunches, homework patrol, and the dreaded weekly head lice checks! Children's social activity increases as they reacquaint with friends that they have not seen over the summer holidays. This increased social contact provides the perfect way for head lice transmission when children interact closely at school. There are many myths about the prevention and treatment of head lice. The information outlined in the statements below will help you separate some fact from fiction!

Myth: Head lice come from dirt!

Fact: Wrong! Anyone can catch head lice. It does not matter how much you clean your house or your hair, head lice simply do not care!

Myth: Head lice live in your house.

Fact: Head lice are insects that feed off of human blood. Lice do not feed on dust, dirt or animals. They need a blood meal 4-6 times a day, and can only feed on scalp skin.

Myth: Head lice can jump and even fly.

Fact: Head lice are tiny, wingless insects. They do not jump, fly, or hop, but they can crawl very quickly.

Myth: You can tell if you have head lice because you will have an itchy head.

Fact: You can have head lice without ever scratching your head. The itch is a type of allergic reaction to the saliva left behind after the lice bites the scalp. Some people do not have this allergic reaction, therefore, may never feel itchy. This is why it is so important to do weekly head checks; some children may never itch or scratch their heads.

Myth: Once head lice are discovered on one person in the household, everyone should be treated to prevent the lice from spreading.

Fact: Treatment products do not prevent people from catching head lice. Applying a product will kill only the live lice that are present at the time of the treatment; it will not prevent future visits from these little critters. It is important to confirm that you have head lice before beginning a treatment regime.

Myth: One treatment kills the lice and the eggs too.

Fact: Treatment products only kill live lice. Nothing kills all the nits, or eggs. They **MUST** be picked or combed out. Hair gels, hairspray, and oils (e.g. tea tree oil) will not kill lice or prevent eggs from hatching. It is very important to take the time needed to completely remove all of the nits. A second application is required 7-10 after the first to kill any lice that may have hatched since the initial treatment.

Myth: If I cut my child's hair really short, the head lice will be gone.

Fact: Cutting hair or shaving your child's head does not keep head lice away. In fact, most lice like to live and lay their eggs within 1cm of the scalp, very near the hair follicle.

Dealing with head lice is difficult and can be frustrating and overwhelming to anyone caring for children. So what can be done to reduce the risk of catching them? Parents and caregivers should check their child's head regularly: once a week as part of a routine, after every sleepover, and every day during lice outbreaks at school. Check areas that are close to the scalp, especially behind the ears, the back of the neck and under the bangs. Teach children not to share personal items, especially those that are used on their heads, such as brushes, hats, helmets, hair accessories, etc. Children should keep long hair tied back or braided. If you do find head lice, it is important to let your school know so steps can be put in place to help reduce transmission to others.

If you have any questions or concerns, your school nurse will be more than happy to assist you.

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