



**Western  
Health**

## What You Need to Know About Head Lice

### What are head lice?

Head lice are tiny, wingless, greyish colour insects that live in human hair. They are a nuisance, but they do not spread any disease. They lay their eggs (nits) on the shaft of the hair close to the scalp. Nits stick to the hair and cannot be washed away like dirt or dandruff.

### How are head lice spread?

Head lice are spread through head to head contact, and through sharing of personal items such as combs, brushes, scarves, hats, headphones, sleeping bags, and stuffed animals. Lice do not jump or fly.

### How do you know someone has head lice?

The first sign of head lice can be a very itchy head. Lice may be seen by carefully looking at the person's head, especially at the neck and behind the ears. Head lice hide from light so they are hard to see. More often you would see the nits (eggs) that the lice lay on the hair. These are white specs, about the size of the head of a pin, that are stuck to the hair near the scalp.

### How do you treat head lice and nits?

Use treatment only if there are live lice or if the nits are close to the scalp. A medicated shampoo or cream rinse can be used to help kill the lice. Nits have to be removed by pulling each one off the hair to which it is attached. This is very time consuming, but a fine tooth comb can help in the removal.

### WARNING:

- Do not use a cream rinse or combination shampoo/cream rinse before using the lice medicine. Do not re-wash hair for 1 – 2 day after treatment.
- Never apply the medicated treatment more than once in 7 days!
- For treatment of pregnant women and children less than two years old please see your doctor.

- If there are still signs of live lice after one or two treatments, see your community health nurse or family doctor.

### Is the shampoo toxic?

The shampoo can be toxic to humans if not used correctly. It should only be used as directed on the bottle. Using the shampoo too often can harm your child.

### When can the child return to school?

Children should return to school once treatment has been completed. People who have had close contact with lice should be checked. This includes family and friends. You should notify the school as well as your Community Health Nurse.

### How do you clean clothes and around the house?

Clothing, bed sheets and blankets should be washed in hot water and dried on the hot cycle whenever possible. Another way to kill the lice is to freeze the clothes, headgear, or other items such as stuffed animals for 24 hours or store them in a sealed bag for two weeks. Regular household cleaning with care to vacuum mattresses, pillows, upholstered furniture and car seats is also recommended. Fumigation of the house or school with sprays is **NOT** recommended and may have harmful effects.

### How do you prevent lice?

It is fairly easy to get head lice. The following measures may help to prevent catching them:

- Let all people who have had contact with your child know, so that they can check their children and prevent spreading them to others and back to your child.
- Teach your child not to share headgear such as hats, combs and brushes.
- Check your child's head on a regular basis.

**For more information about Head Lice please contact the Community Health Nurse in your area.**