



Head lice are a common problem in child care settings and schools. Anyone can get head lice – they are not a sign of being dirty. There are two other kinds of lice that infest people, but they do not live on the head.

Head lice are very small, tan-colored, insects [less than  $\frac{1}{8}$  inch long] that live on human heads. They lay their eggs [nits] close to the scalp. The eggs are tiny [about the size of the eye of a small needle] and gray or white in color.

Parents are encouraged to check their child for head lice. If lice or eggs are found, follow recommended treatment and prevention actions.

### **SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS**

Itching of the scalp and neck are common signs. Look for 1) crawling lice in the hair, usually few in number; 2) eggs [nits] glued to the hair, often found behind the ears and at the back of the neck; and 3) scratch marks on the scalp or back of the neck at the hairline.

### **SPREAD**

Lice are spread by direct person-to-person contact and by sharing personal items like combs, brushes, hats, scarves, jackets, blankets, sheets, pillowcases, etc.

Lice do not jump or fly; they crawl and can fall off of the head. Head lice do not live longer than 48 hours off of the head. Nits which are more than  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch from the scalp are dead or empty and will not hatch. Also, the eggs do not hatch if they fall off. Lice do not spread to or from pets.

### **CONTAGIOUS PERIOD**

Until treated with a lice-killing medication, crawling forms of the louse are communicable; the nits are not.

### **TREATMENT**

- Use a lice-killing shampoo, lotion or cream rinse obtained either over-the-counter or by prescription.
- Follow the directions carefully. Directions will vary depending on the product used. If live lice are seen after treatment, try a different brand.
- For some medications, a second treatment is recommended to kill any nits that may have survived the first treatment. If you use a prescription medication, discuss this with your physician.
- Removing nits after proper treatment is not necessary for controlling the spread of head lice. The nits are glued onto the hair shaft as they are laid, and they are difficult to remove. Fine-toothed combs are available if you wish to remove nits.

## **PREVENTION/CONTROL**

1. Avoid sharing hair care items, towels, bedding, clothing, hats and headgear like headphones and sports helmets.
2. Hang clothing in individual lockers or on assigned coat hooks.
3. all contaminated combs, brushes and similar items must be disinfected by:
  - a. soaking in a medicated shampoo for 10 minutes, or
  - b. soaking in two percent Lysol solution for one hour, or
  - c. heating in water of at least 130 degrees F for 10 minutes.
4. Clean floors, furniture, mattresses and carpeting by thorough vacuuming. The use of insecticide sprays is not recommended.
5. Recently worn clothing like jackets, hats, scarves, pajamas, etc. and bedding and towels should be washed in hot [130 degrees F or higher] water and dried in a hot dryer for at least 20 minutes before being used again. Unwashable clothing, linens and stuffed toys can be dry cleaned or sealed in a plastic bag for two weeks.
6. Check your child's head frequently throughout the year. If one person in a family, day care setting, school, etc. has head lice, others should be checked as well. Only those who have head lice should be treated.

Any brand names in this document are mentioned for identification purposes only.

**For more information, call 817-321-4700 or visit our Web site:  
<http://health.tarrantcounty.com>**