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Dear Parents, Guardians and Girls,

This is the time of the year when head lice often make an appearance in schools so I thought I would do some research and share the information with you to make our school a healthier place.

What are head lice?

Head lice are parasitic wingless insects. This means that they need a living thing to feed on. Their scientific name is *Pediculus humanus capitis*. They live on people's heads and feed on their blood. An adult louse is about the size of a sesame seed.



This picture shows the actual size of head lice.

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Head lice lay eggs, called nits, which stick to the individual hairs. These are white and even smaller than the lice. Lice and nits are easiest to detect at the neckline and behind the ears.

The picture below shows both adults and nits on a person's head. Notice how the nits are glued to the hairs, which makes them difficult to remove.



Head lice are extremely contagious. It is estimated that 1 in every 10 children get head lice at one time or another. Anyone can get them no matter how clean you are. Personal hygiene has nothing to do with getting head lice!

Symptoms of Head lice Infestation

At first they may be unnoticeable but as they reproduce you may feel the following:

- Tickling feeling in the hair
- Frequent itching because many people are allergic to their bites
- Sores from scratching, which may become infected with bacteria
- Irritability and difficulty sleeping.(Head lice are most active in the dark)

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Treatment

Treatment for head lice is recommended for people with an active infestation. All household members and other close contacts should be checked. Anyone who has an active infestation should be treated. All infested people and their bed mates should be treated at the same time.

1. Apply lice medicine, according to the label instructions. If you have extra-long hair, you may need to use a second bottle. **WARNING:** Do not use a conditioner or combination shampoo/conditioner before using lice medicine. Do not rewash hair for one to two days after treatment.
2. Have the infested person put on clean clothing after treatment.
3. If some live lice are still found eight to 12 hours after treatment but are moving more slowly than before, do not retreat. Comb dead and remaining live lice out of the hair. The medicine sometimes takes longer to kill the lice.
4. If, 8 to 12 hours after treatment, no dead lice are found and lice seem as active as before, the medicine may not be working. See your pharmacist for a different medication and follow their treatment instructions.
5. Nit (head lice egg) combs, often found in lice medicine packages should be used to remove nits and lice from the hair shaft.
6. After the initial treatment, check, comb, and remove nits and lice from hair every two to three days.
7. Retreat in 7 to 10 days.
8. Check all treated people for two to three weeks until you are sure all lice and nits are gone.



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Who is at risk of getting head lice?

Anyone who comes in close contact with someone who already has head lice, or even their contaminated clothing and other belongings, is at risk for acquiring head lice. So it is easy to transmit head lice from one person to another. Statistically, girls contract head lice more often than boys, and women contract more head lice than men. African-Americans rarely acquire head lice.

Transfer of head lice from one to another is so easy!



Treating the house

Machine wash all washable clothing and bed linen that the infested person touched during the two days before treatment (to kill the lice and nits). Use the hot water cycle (130 F; 55 C) to wash clothes. Dry laundry using the hot cycle for at least 20 minutes or hang out in the sunshine.

Dry clean clothing that is not washable (coats, hats, scarves, etc.)

Soak combs and brushes for one hour in surgical spirit

Prevention

To reduce the chance of you or your child contracting a case of head lice, start by not sharing items that touch the head. Though it may be tempting to share personal belongings (especially for kids), doing so can lead to the spread of head lice.

Avoid sharing:

- Combs and brushes
- Hair clips and accessories
- Hats and bike helmets
- Scarves and coats
- Towels
- Headsets and earbuds



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Is it important to prevent infestation?

Head lice are not known to transmit any disease and therefore are not considered a health hazard. However, they won't go away just because you want them to—in fact, if you do nothing, it is very likely that you, your spouse, your children, your friends, and their friends will all eventually get infested.

While it is relatively infrequent, kids scratching their heads can get secondary infections. These can range from fairly mild to pretty severe. You certainly don't want to put your child at risk of even more discomfort and the need for further treatments.

References:

http://www.medicinenet.com/head_lice/page2.htm#who_is_at_risk_for_getting_head_lice

<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/headlice.html#cat11>

<http://www.healthline.com/health/lice/head-lice-prevention#Sharing2>

<http://www.healthline.com/health/lice-dangers-of-not-treating>

<http://www.cdc.gov/parasites/lice/head/disease.html>

I hope you will find this information interesting and useful.

Regards,

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