



FACT SHEET

Head Lice (Pediculosis)

What is it?

Head lice are tiny insects that can live and breed in your hair. They are a nuisance but do not transmit disease. Head lice are not an indication of cleanliness; anyone can get head lice. The eggs of head lice (nits) can be seen at the base of hair follicles or on the scalp, usually at the base of the neck or around the ears. They have three stages in their life cycle; the nit, nymph and adult.

How is it spread?

Head lice are spread from direct head-to-head contact and may spread through shared items like hats or hair brushes. Head lice that live on people cannot survive on pets so transmission to or from animals is not possible.

What are the signs and symptoms?

Head lice do not cause illness. They can cause irritation to the scalp which can result in an itchy feeling. If you think you might have head lice, have your scalp checked for nits in a well lit room. Your scalp should be checked again after a week and once more after two weeks.

How are head lice treated?

Many treatments for head lice exist. Before buying any product, talk to your pharmacist. Many shampoos are designed to treat head lice and have proven to be effective. It is important to follow the directions for these shampoos carefully. Talk to your doctor before treating children under the age of two, or if you are pregnant or breast feeding. Check the heads of all family members and treat those affected at the same time to prevent reinfestation.

Extra housecleaning and use of insecticide sprays are not needed; however, washing combs, brushes, headgears, pillow cases, sheets and towels in hot water is recommended.

How to prevent it?

Avoid direct head-to-head contact and sharing items such as combs, brushes, hair pieces and towels, etc. with individuals who have head lice.

For More Information

Contact: Community Health Programs, Community Wellbeing Centre
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Phone: 613-967-3603 Fax: 613-962-4210 Website: <http://www.mbq-tmt.org>

References: Canadian Pediatric Society http://www.caringforkids.cps.ca/handouts/head_lice