

## HEAD LICE ALERT

Dear Parent/Guardian:

There has been a case of head lice in your child's classroom. Please check your child's hair and scalp carefully.

- Step 1:** Find a comfortable well-lit spot.
- Step 2:** Check the hair from the scalp to the end of the hair strand. First look at the hair at the back of the neck, behind the ears and above the forehead. Then, check the rest of the head.
- Step 3:** You are looking for live lice and /or nits. Nits (eggs) are attached to the hair close to the scalp. Nits are white to light brown in color and may be confused with dandruff. Nits are firmly attached to the hair and do not move unless you slide them down the hair strand. Adult lice are difficult to see as they move quickly. They are the size of a sesame seed and are tan to greyish white.
- Step 4:** If you find a louse or nit, check all household members. Treat only those who have head lice or nits, following Option A or B (see attached).
- Step 5:** Let the school know if your child has head lice or nits.

To find head lice early, it is a good idea to check your child/children once a week for head lice.

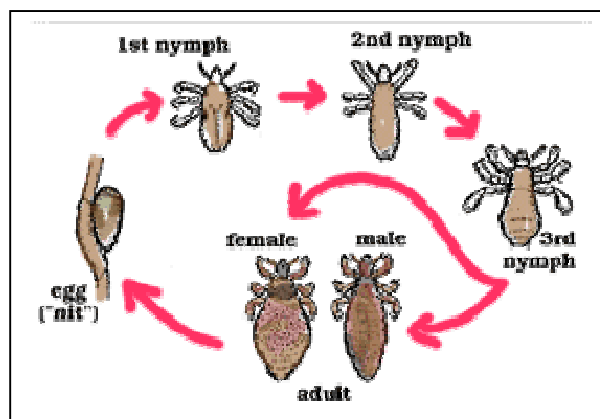
For further information, please contact the On-Call Community Health Nurse at your local Community Health Centre at 604 983-6700.

## HEAD LICE FACTS

Head lice are an ongoing problem in today's society. They are not a major public health concern in that they do not spread disease. They become a community concern because of the nuisance and discomfort surrounding infestations and spread.

- Head lice are tiny insects about the size of a sesame seed.
- Head lice live only on a person's head.
- Anyone who has hair can get head lice.
- Head lice do not jump or fly.
- Head lice can move quickly on dry hair, so they are difficult to see.
- Head lice bites can make the scalp itchy.

### Biology and Life Cycle of Head Lice



To see head lice photos click here: [www.hsph.harvard.edu/headlice.html](http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/headlice.html)

- Head lice do not cause disease
- Adult head lice lay about 10 eggs (called nits) every day. These nits are stuck to the hair near the scalp.
- It takes 7-10 days for the nits to hatch.
- It takes 6-10 days for lice to become adult. During that time, it stays on the head, but does not lay.
- You can find nits anywhere in the head especially behind the ears or on the back of the neck.
- Nits can vary from white to brown and are about 1/3 the size of a sesame seed.
- You can't get rid of nits by brushing, or with a hair dryer.
- After the head lice hatch, the shell of the nit stays stuck to the hair. If it is more than 12 mm (1/2 inch) away from the scalp, it is probably empty.
- You can get head lice by touching heads with someone who has head lice, or by sharing combs, brushes and hats.
- Head lice are common where children play or work closely together.

**OPTION A: HEAD LICE SHAMPOO** (Special head lice shampoos/rinses are used because they have been tested and determined to be a safe and effective treatment)

**Kill the Head Lice and Remove the Nits**

This option involves using two applications of a special head lice shampoo/rinse, 7 to 10 days apart. This special shampoo/rinse is available without a prescription at any pharmacy. The shampoo/rinse kills the head lice on the head but may not kill the nits. The nits need to be removed from the hair using a special “nit” comb and/or using your fingers. Reinfestation can occur, and if it does, consult your Community Health Nurse.

**ASK YOUR PHARMACIST ABOUT HEAD LICE SHAMPOOS/RINSES**

**STEPS TO FOLLOW**

<b>DO</b>	<b>REMEMBER</b>
1. <u>Check the heads</u> of all family members. Check hair, especially behind ears and back of neck for lice eggs (nits) – look for white to light brown oval specks “glued” to the strands of hair, very close (within 12 mm or ½ inch) to the scalp.	1. If one person in the family has head lice, there is an increased chance that other family members have head lice too. Dandruff can be flicked off the hair; nits are stuck to the hair.
2. <u>Treat</u> infested family members at the same time. <b>Read and follow directions carefully.</b> Do not use conditioners for 1 week following treatment.	2. Unless you treat all infested family members, head lice can be passed on from one person to another when heads touch. Conditioners can reduce the effectiveness of treatment.
3. <u>Remove all nits</u> Gently use “nit” comb (metal works best) or use your fingers to pull nits from the single strands of hair. Rinse nit comb or fingers in a sink or bowl of warm water and wipe dry after each stroke.	3. Metal nit combs are available at your local pharmacy. If the nit comb tugs the hair, try untangling the hair with a wide tooth comb and then retry the nit comb.
4. <u>Wash</u> clothing worn in the past 2 – 3 days, bed sheets and pillowcases and place in <u>hot</u> cycle of the dryer <u>or</u> put the items in a sealed plastic bag for 10 days, <u>or</u> place the sealed bag in the freezer for 24 hours.	4. There is no evidence that a major clean up of the house is necessary to get rid of head lice. Only items that have been in direct contact with the affected person need to be washed. E.g. shirts, jackets, hats, combs, brushes.
5. <u>Treat a second time</u> 7 – 10 days later. Repeat step 3.	5. A second treatment will make sure that any head lice, which hatch after the first shampoo, will be killed before they have a chance to lay any eggs. Two treatments and a follow-up check of the head with nit removal is the best way to make sure head lice are gone.
6. If live head lice or new nits are found, try Option B. Consult a Community Health Nurse if you have any questions.	6. Wet combing breaks the life cycle of head lice by removing them before they are grown and able to reproduce.

**OPTION B: WET COMBING** (A non-chemical way to find and eliminate head lice).

**Remove the Head Lice**

Wet combing is based on the life cycle of head lice. It focuses on removing the live head lice and does not require removing the nits from the head. Combing treatments are done every 3 – 4 days over a two-week period. This breaks the life cycle of head lice by removing them before they are fully-grown and able to reproduce.

This option is cheap and safe but is time consuming and requires that the steps below be followed carefully and completely. Talk to your Community Health Nurse if you require further information.

**STEPS TO FOLLOW**

<b>DO</b>	<b>REMEMBER</b>
1. <u>Wash</u> hair with ordinary shampoo and rinse.	1. Note: On average, a wet combing session takes about ½ hour per person.
2. <u>Apply</u> at least ½ cup of conditioner (any brand) to completely wet all of the hair. Do not rinse out the conditioner.	2. Untangle hair with a regular wide tooth comb. Wet conditioner will immobilize the lice.
3. <u>Comb</u> sections of hair using a “nit” comb (metal works best). Divide hair into small sections. Firmly draw the comb from the scalp to the end of the hair. After each stroke, rinse the comb in a sink or bowl of warm water, and wipe dry. Continue section by section until the entire head is done. Make sure hair stays wet during combing with conditioner.	3. Metal nit combs are available at your local pharmacy. If the comb tugs the hair, use more conditioner.
4. <u>Rinse</u> hair. Leave hair dripping wet. Repeat Step 3 combing <u>without conditioner</u> , until no lice are found.	4. Check the comb and your fingernails for head lice (you don’t want to put any lice back in the hair).
5. <u>Repeat</u> Step 1 – 4 every 3 – 4 days for two weeks.	5. Use a wide-tooth comb to untangle and then use the fine tooth metal nit comb again.
6. <u>If live head lice or new nits are found after two weeks of wet combing, try Option A or talk to your Community Health Nurse.</u>	6. Wet combing breaks the life cycle of head lice by removing them before they are full grown and able to reproduce.

**DAYS TO WET COMB**

<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>8</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>14</b>