**Head Lice**

**What are head lice?**

Head lice are small insects that live on the scalp.
***Anyone can get head lice.*** They are common in classrooms and day care centres because children play closely together.

Head lice are not dangerous and they do not spread disease, but they are contagious and can be a very pesky problem. Having dirty hair does not cause head lice. Head lice cannot fly or jump and you cannot get them from your pets.

While they may be ***found anywhere on the head***, they prefer to live on the scalp along the neckline and behind the ears. When lice bite the scalp they cause itching.

**How can I tell if my child has head lice?**

Children may say they have a tickling feeling on their head or may be very itchy on their scalp.

The only way to be sure a person has an active case of lice is to find live lice. Children can have a few nits (lice eggs) without actually having an active case of head lice. Usually children have no more than 10 to 20 live lice.

Lice are not easy to see and can be hard to find. They are about the size of a sesame seed. They are usually greyish white or brown.



Nits are small, oval and blend into the color of the hair. Each nit is firmly attached to a hair. They cannot be washed out or flicked off like dandruff. Finding nits does not mean the individual has a current infestation and they should not be treated based on finding nits.



**How do I check for lice?**

1. Apply ample hair conditioner to dry hair, enough to soak from the scalp to the end of the strands.
2. Remove tangles with a regular comb.
3. Start behind the ears and comb the hair section by section. Separating the hair with hair clips is helpful.
4. Place the lice comb against the scalp and pull to the end of the hair.
5. Check the comb for lice after each pull.
6. Wipe the comb with a tissue each time and look for lice.
7. Place the tissue in a bag.
8. Check all the hair over the entire head.
9. Repeat combing for every part of the head at least 5 times.
10. Once finished, tie the bag with the soiled tissues and throw it in the garbage.
11. If lice are detected and treatment is required, make sure that all conditioner is washed from the hair prior to treatment.

**What is the treatment for head lice?**

***Overtreatment and misdiagnosis are common.***Do not treat anyone with a head lice product unless you find live lice in their hair. The presence of nits indicates a past infestation that may not be active.

Check everyone in the home for head lice.

There are a number of very effective treatments for head lice. Most contain an insecticide that kills the lice. They are pyrethrin (found in R&CTM shampoo/ conditioner), permethrin (Nix® or Kwellada-P®) and lindane (PMS-LindaneTM shampoo).

A non-insecticidal treatment called isopropyl myristate/cyclomethicone (ResultzTM) has been approved for use in Canada for individuals **4 years of age and older**. It works by breaking down the waxy exoskeleton (‘skin') of lice. The lice get dehydrated and die.

**All of the above products require a second application 7 to 10 days after the first treatment.**

Tell the pharmacist if anyone needing treatment is pregnant, breastfeeding, under six years of age, has allergies or a serious health problem.

A pharmacist, doctor or public health nurse can help you choose the best product for you.

If live lice (not nits) are found in the hair 24 to 48 hours after a treatment with one product:

* Treat right away with a different treatment product;
* Repeat this treatment 7 - 10 days later.

**Examine all of the household members for head lice everyday for 3 weeks after the first treatment.**