

Head lice is here and this has led to panic and unfounded fears about head lice. Head lice can quickly spread throughout a school because of close proximity of children and the sharing of many articles. However, Leader Composite School has taken a number of measures to prevent the spread of head lice. Now it is time for a community-wide approach to stop the cycle of infestation. This article is intended to inform the public about head lice and to standardize treatment in order to prevent further transmission of lice.

### What are head lice?

Lice are small insects that live on the scalp. Lice cause your head to itch by clawing and biting your skin. They feed off of human blood. Lice are very small, about the size of a sesame seed, and are grayish brown or white. Lice lay eggs called nits. Nits are cemented to a strand of hair near the scalp. Nits further than 1 inch from the scalp are empty.

*Lice DO NOT carry disease.*

### How are lice spread?

Having dirty hair does not cause lice, in fact they prefer clean hair. Lice cannot fly, jump or hop from one person to another. You get lice by having close head to head contact with another person or by sharing items such as combs, brushes,

hair accessories, hats, scarves, helmets, and coats. Lice can only survive for a maximum of 48 hours away from a human host, thus items that have not been used for more than 2 days are not infested and are safe to use.

### Head Lice Treatment

Insecticides can be purchased at the local pharmacy. (If cost is an issue please speak to the pharmacist, financial assistance may be available). Do not treat members of the household who do not have lice. Pre-treating can lead to resistance and unnecessarily exposes people to insecticides. Follow the instructions for each product exactly. Conditioner or a 2-in-1 product should not be used immediately before treatment. The insecticide must be left on for the exact recommended time; however, leaving the product on for longer than recommended will not be more effective and can be harmful. Some products have a residual effect; this is negated if the hair is shampooed during the two days following treatment. Repeat in 7-10 days but not before even if you see live lice. It takes 8-10 hours before lice will be affected by the treatment and at least 24 hours before they will be killed. If you see several live lice after 24 hours, speak to a health care professional as treatment failure may have occurred.



Nit picking is the most important part of lice treatment. Some products claim to kill nits but they are not 100% effective. Nits that are not killed will hatch in 7 days and the lice infestation will start all over again. Nit picking can take several hours. Sit your child down in front of a movie or with a book to prevent fidgeting. Divide the hair into small sections, pinning the sections with a bobby pin can be useful. (Figure 1) Using the nit comb provided; comb the hair in one



complete motion, start at the scalp and drag the nits to the end of the hair shaft, then off. (Figure 2)

Frequently rinse the comb in hot soapy water and wipe with a paper towel. (Figure 3) Once each section is nit-free curl it up with a bobby pin. Continue until all sections have been completed.

Nit picking should be done every 3-4 days as new nits hatch. Each family member should be inspected daily for at least 14 days. It is important that not only the person who has lice or may have been in contact with lice is checked but other immediate and extended family



members as well. Head lice may not be symptomatic; if you aren't itching you can still have lice and not know it.

### **Other Preventative Measures**

Wash pillowcases, sheets, nightclothes, towels and stuffed animals in hot water. Laundry should be dried using high heat for at least 20 minutes. Combs, brushes, and other hair accessories in contact with an infested person should be soaked in hot water, rubbing alcohol, or Lysol for one hour each day to dislodge any lice and nits. Any items that cannot be washed or dry cleaned should be stored in a sealed plastic bag for 2 weeks or placed in the freezer for 48 hours. Vacuuming flooring and furniture will pick up any stray lice. Do not use fumigant sprays unless they are specifically designed for lice because harsh chemical sprays can adversely affect household members and have limited efficacy against lice. Pets may transfer lice from one person to another but they cannot become infested and do not need to be treated.

If you have any questions or concerns please contact Gord or Leah at Stueck Pharmacy or Wanda at the Leader Medical Clinic.