



Interior Health

RECOMMENDED

HEAD LICE

MANAGEMENT

Revised: December 2003

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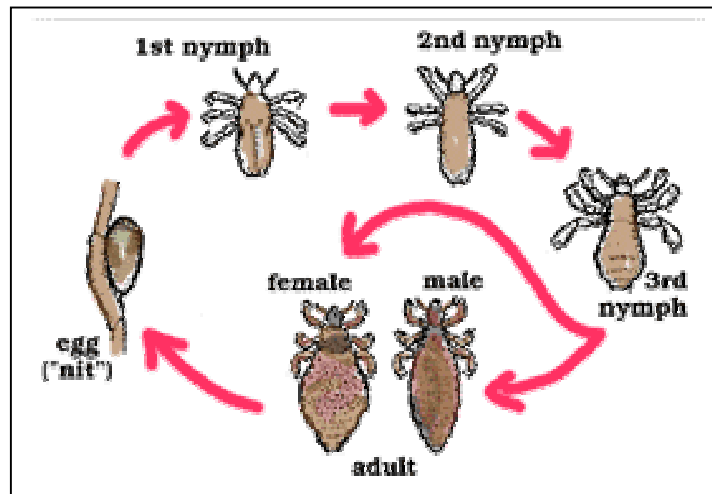


Interior Health

HEAD LICE FACTS

- 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

- 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.

RECOMMENDED HEAD LICE MANAGEMENT

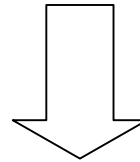
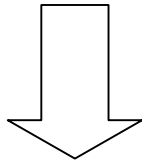
Head lice are an on-going problem in today's society. They are not a major public health concern in that they do not spread disease. They become a community concern because of the nuisance and discomfort surrounding infestations and spread.

To achieve optimal control of head lice in the community:

1. The family and community should take responsibility for the control of head lice.
2. Public Health Nurses provide training for volunteers and offer consultation to parents and the community (i.e. schools, facilities) on the management of head lice.
3. Trained volunteers can assist families and the community by providing head lice screening and parent education.
4. If a child is found to have head lice, the child may remain with the class until the end of the school day. The parents will be informed by the school and receive a letter and treatment information. Parents will be advised that their child cannot return to school until they receive the initial treatment.
5. A letter will be distributed by the school to parents of children in the classroom in which head lice has been identified.
6. Treatment Options A and B are available for parents. If these options are not effective or require clarification, parents are directed to contact a Public Health Nurse at the nearest HEALTH CENTRE/UNIT [see Resources/References](#) for a list of the nearest Health Centre/Unit in your area.

HEAD LICE TREATMENT

TWO ACCEPTABLE TREATMENT OPTIONS



OPTION A:

Head Lice Shampoo:

**(Kill the Head Lice
&
Remove the Nits)**

Special head lice shampoos/rinses are used because they have been tested and determined to be a safe and effective treatment

OPTION B:

Wet-Combing

(Remove the Head Lice)

A non-chemical way to find and eliminate head lice.

OPTION A: HEAD LICE SHAMPOO

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 Public Health Nurse.

ASK YOUR PHARMACIST ABOUT HEAD LICE SHAMPOOS/RINSES

STEPS TO FOLLOW

DO	REMEMBER
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. Read and follow directions carefully. 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, it may be upside down.
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 Public 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

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 Public Health Nurse if you require further information.

STEPS TO FOLLOW

DO	REMEMBER
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 thoroughly saturate 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, it may be upside down.
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 give them a ride back to the head).
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>After two weeks of wet combing if live head lice or new nits are found, try Option A or talk to your Public 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

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14

ALTERNATIVE TREATMENTS

Interior Health is continuing to gather scientific evidence on the effectiveness of these options:

- ◆ Olive oil
- ◆ Mineral oil
- ◆ Vinegar
- ◆ Mayonnaise
- ◆ Vaseline
- ◆ Robi comb
- ◆ Follicel

DANGEROUS REMEDIES – DO NOT USE

The following treatments are either not effective and/or not safe.

Insect Sprays (Raid)
Oil (WD40)
Gasoline
Flea Soap
Alcohol
Shaving Gel
Shaving the Head

Dyes
Bleaches
Chinese Chalk
Heat Directly on Scalp
Enzyme Reactions
Kerosene
Garlic

Essential Oils (Pine, Tea Tree, Thyme, Rosemary, Eucalyptus etc....) are not recommended at this time due to limited data and possible toxicity concerns.