

# Head Lice Prevention and Treatment

By Terry Haag, RN and Rodney Barrow, RN

## **Facts about Lice:**

- Lice live in cycles: the egg, the nymph and the adult louse.
- Adults may be no bigger than a quotation mark and move very quickly to hide in the hair.
- Their color may blend with the hair, but is usually grayish brown. If you think you saw one, you probably did.
- The live louse lives up to 30 days and the female will lay up to 100 eggs in her lifetime.
- Nits (as the eggs are called as they develop), will attach to the hair shaft anywhere from ½ inch from the scalp all the way down a hair shaft. They attach like glue and cannot be flicked off like dandruff would be. They may look like dandruff or creamy colored to a light brown. They hatch 7-10 days after they are laid.
- Other signs of lice are itching and red marks along the nape of the infested person's neck where the lice have bitten.
- Medicated prescriptions are not effective unless used exactly as directed and also that even with perfect application, nits and some adult lice may still make it through the treatment.

## **Prevention:**

- Teach your child never to share hats, combs, brushes, ties, towels, helmets, I-pod ear buds, pillows, and sleeping bags.
- Keep long hair up in a braid and coated with hair products like hairspray to coat the surface of the hair and make it harder for lice to jump on and attach. Some herbal and essential oils that have been promoted in discouraging lice are rosemary and citronella.
- Do not wash the hair every day. Lice can attach easier to a squeaky-clean hair shaft than a dirty one. Buildup of natural oil and hair products can "coat" the hair shaft making attachment more difficult.
- Store all jackets, backpacks etc. separately.
- DO WEEKLY HEAD CHECKS. FOCUS ON HOT SPOTS - NAPE OF NECK, BEHIND EARS, PART LINES.
- WATCH FOR SYMPTOMS OF ITCHING AND RED SPOTS ALONG NAPE OF NECK.
- Avoid sharing dress up play clothes and helmets.

## **Treatment:**

- Purchase a Lice treatment kit and shampoo at the drug store, or one of the available on-line products. Follow the direction carefully. Lice treatment shampoos are applied to dry hair and you need to use enough product, especially for long, thick hair. Part the hair every inch to make sure you are adequately coating the hair.

- Check hair shafts for nits and comb and pick them off of the hair shafts. If one makes it through you start all over. Pick them off. Cut hair shorter if very long and thick and full of nits.
- Wash all clothes brushes, stuffed toys, bedding, in hot water and throw in dryer for at least 20 minutes.
- Disinfect combs and brushes and hair accessories by soaking in hot, soapy water for 10 minutes.
- Vacuum rugs, carpets, mattresses and car seats thoroughly. Bag items such as stuffed animals or other items you can't wash in hot water, for 10 days in a closed garbage bag.
- It has been found to be helpful in combing out nits and possibly in smothering the nits that have made it through medicated RX, to cover the head in olive oil, a day after medicated treatment, for a night or 8 hours. The next morning wash hair and remove any nits that might be seen.
- **CHECK AND RECHECK THE HEAD OF EVERY HOUSEHOLD MEMBER FOR AT LEAST 14 DAYS. OFTEN IF ONE NIT IS LEFT, THE CYCLE WILL START ALL OVER WITHIN 2 WEEKS TO A MONTH, WHEN THE LICE POPULATION BUILDS UP AGAIN ON THE HEAD.**
- If live lice are found, start treatment cycle again. If nits are found remove them and if you seem to be finding more each day, you may need to look for live lice again.

Please let us know if you find lice on your student. We can walk through the eradication process with you.

In an effort to be vigilant about prevention, we also send out general reminder letters to parents if outbreaks of lice occur in the school.

Any questions please call Terry Haag RN School Nurse at ES, MS and HS and Rodney Barrow RN, School Nurse at Lodi Primary School.

September 2, 2009