

**September 2017**

## **Head Lice**

Recently, there has been a report of head lice in the school. To help limit the spread, please review the following information:

### **What are head lice?**

Head lice are small grayish insects – the size of a sesame seed – that can live on a person’s head. They do not jump or fly, but they move quickly. Lice lay tiny grey-white eggs that stick to hair very close to the scalp. An adult louse can live for one or two days away from the head. Eggs that are within 1 centimeter of the scalp indicate that the female is nearby. Eggs that are further than 1 centimeter away from the scalp *may* indicate that the nits have been in the hair for longer than seven days.

### **How are lice spread?**

Lice are spread through head to head contact with someone who has lice or by sharing personal items such as hairbrushes or hats. Anyone can get lice. Having lice is not a sign of being *unclean* or having poor hygiene. Lice are very common in daycares and schools. Head lice may be annoying or embarrassing, but do not harm your health.

### **What are the symptoms of head lice?**

Symptoms of lice include:

- Constant itching of the head
- Red marks on the scalp

Nits (1 millimetre long) can be seen firmly attached to hair (don’t confuse with dandruff, which is easily brushed off). Lice are hard to see.

### **How are head lice prevented?**

- Teach your child not to share combs, hats, headgear, etc.
- Check your child’s head every week. Look carefully for nits or lice around the temples, behind the ears and at the back of the neck.
- If you think your child may have lice, but are unsure, contact a healthcare professional.
- Treat lice as quickly as possible and take time to remove nits after treatment.
- Discreetly tell all possible contacts (example: schoolmates, daycare workers) so they can be checked or treated
- All family members should check their hair, but treat **only** those who actually have head lice.



After an outbreak of lice, soak combs and brushes in hot water. Bedding, hats, toys etc should be washed in hot water and dried in a hot dry cycle, dry cleaned, or sealed in a plastic bag for two weeks. Do not use fumigant sprays because they can be harmful.

### **How are head lice treated?**

You can buy anti-lice shampoo or lotions at a pharmacy. Read and follow directions carefully, as products can be harmful if used incorrectly or too many times.

- Apply to clean hair only. Wash hair with shampoo only (do not use conditioner or combined shampoo/conditioner) and dry well.
- Apply enough of the lice shampoo/lotion to soak the hair (long hair may need more than one bottle.)
- Leave the product in for the amount of time noted on the bottle (usually 10 minutes) – not longer.
- Do not use a conditioner or shampoo for two days after treatment.

Remove nits from hair with a fine-toothed comb or by pulling them out with your fingernails. Put the nits in a bag and throw it out. It may take several days to remove all the nits. A child can return to school / daycare after the lice are treated with anti-lice shampoo/lotion.

Two days after treatment, check the head again. If no lice are seen, then retreat with the same product seven to ten days after the first treatment. The second treatment kills lice/nits that may have been missed the first time. But, if you see live lice, retreat again immediately with a different anti-lice product, followed by another application in seven to ten days. If treatment is not working, then call your public health nurse or doctor.

### **Additional Resource**

Additional information can be found on Alberta Health Services' s website. [Click here.](#)