



## **Head Lice Screening Program**

### **Description**

The head louse is a small almond shaped bug that is transparent in color. However it feeds frequently on blood so almost always appear dark brown in color: Head lice have 6 hook shaped legs which enable them to move through hair very quickly but on a smooth surface they stay put or move quite slow. Lice do not have wings. They are unable to fly!

### **Life Cycle**

An adult louse will live for up to 30 days and their eggs will hatch within 7 to 10 days. A newly hatched louse will mature within 7 to 10 days in which case it is then capable of laying eggs of its own. The egg requires the warmth of the scalp to hatch.

### **Facts**

Head lice feed frequently; approximately every 3 hours. Head lice will not survive off the head for more than 12 to 24 hours. Generally if a louse is off the head it is either dead or injured. Head lice are a human parasite and will not live on anything but the human head.... Rover the dog is safe! Head lice prefer clean hair and a healthy scalp.

Eggs are clear or dark brown in color. The color is determined in large part by the person's hair color. Black hair will always show eggs as being a clear white and a very blond person will always have dark brown eggs. When removed they always appear dark in color.

Nits are the empty shells of eggs. They always appear white on the hair. When removed they stay all white in color. The only way to determine if an egg is viable or just an empty shell is to remove it and see if it stays all white.

A female louse can lay as many as 100 eggs. She will lay up to 15 per day. Eggs are tear dropped in shape and are glued to the hair shaft. They can be confused with hair casts however hair casts are more tubular in shape. Hair casts are seen easily in people with dark hair.

## **Treatment**

Head lice are usually treated with products that can be purchased at a local drug store. These products are a pesticide base and should not be used more than once in a one-week period and must always be followed up with a second treatment 7 to 10 days following the initial treatment.

Before treatment with a drugstore product, the hair needs to be free of any conditioners or styling products.

Removal of the eggs and nits from the hair is essential for a successful outcome regardless of your treatment.

Plastic or metal nit combs can be used for the removal of eggs. Metal combs are somewhat better. However they can shred the hair and hurt the child and should probably only be used in extreme cases to remove the bulk of the eggs.

Dividing the hair into small sections and removing the eggs with your finger nails or tweezers is the most effective method. An average outbreak will take approximately 10 to 15 hours of "nit picking" to be clear. This is approximate and is determined in large part by length and thickness of hair.

## **Homeopathic Treatments**

Hospital for Sick Kids recommends a mineral oil and vinegar 50/50 mixture. The mineral oil is used to smother the lice and cut them off from their food source. The vinegar is used to help break down the glue that binds the eggs to the hair shaft. Nothing magical happens when the mineral oil and vinegar are combined so they can be used separately as well. Keep in mind that people with head lice tend to have open sores on their heads from being bitten. Putting vinegar on an open sore can be quite painful. Vinegar does not make the eggs drop out so for the very minor ease of removal, vinegar is not recommended especially when working with children. The frustration for parents is locating the egg, not removing it.

Mineral oil is a good consistency for smothering the louse however can be quite difficult to remove from the hair when the treatment is finished. The best product to use is hair gel as it is inexpensive and washes out easily. The key to a homeopathic treatment is the length of time it is applied to the head. The oil or gel needs to be applied to the head liberally and then sealed under a bathing cap or shower cap pulled tight to the head. This should be left in place for at least 6 to 8 hours. The reason for this is you want the bug to miss at least 1 if not 2 feedings. Egg removal is essential with homeopathic treatment as the oil or gel will in no way affect the eggs.

## **Prevention**

Avoiding head to head contact is the primary way of preventing head lice. Anything that "gums" the hair up or makes it appear dirty such as gels, mousse or hair spray act as a deterrent. Hair spray is a helmet in a can!

Tea tree oil is also a product that can be added to your regular shampoo. Brushing your hair vigorously before bed is a good routine as it could brush out a new intruder or

possibly injure the bug. Setting up a weekly check is a good habit as early detection makes for easier removal.

### **The Recheck**

When your child has been treated and all the eggs have been removed it is necessary to make an appointment to be seen by a We Care nurse at a school near you. It is important to bring your child with clean, dry hair as it is too difficult to properly check oily, wet hair and the nurse will likely refuse to check. Be sure to be on time and if you decide not to attend a recheck that has been scheduled be sure to call and cancel. Our nurses are here to help and welcome all your questions, the recheck is a great opportunity to work together to make sure your head lice experience is a short one.