

## HEAD LICE INFORMATION

Head lice (*Pediculus humanus capitis*) are tiny wingless insects that are about 1-2 millimeters long (about the size of a sesame seed). They live on the scalp and neck of humans. When an infestation happens there may be up to 12 adult lice on the scalp at any one time. They feed from human blood and must eat at least twice a day. They cannot survive for more than one day at room temperature off a human body.

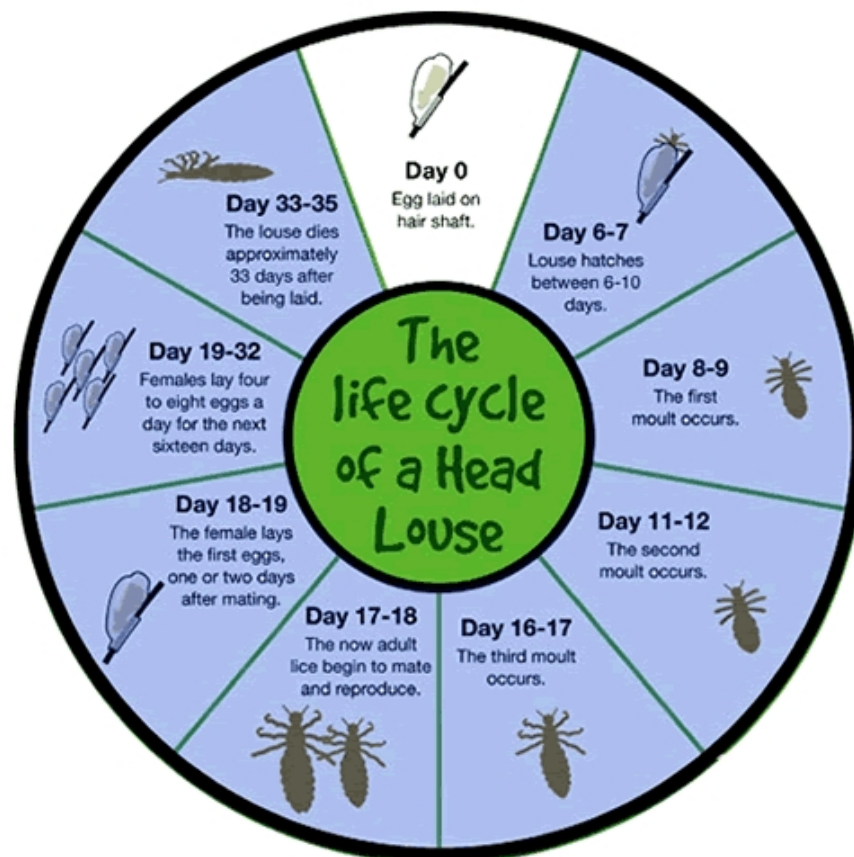
### Who is at risk for getting head lice?

Those with the greatest risk are anyone who has head-to-head contact with someone who already has head lice. Studies have indicated that head-to-head contact is primarily the mode of transmission for the spread of lice from person- to- person. At times head lice may be spread from contact with clothing, such as hats, scarves, coats. Another mode of transmission is the sharing of personal items such as brushes or towels that belong to an infested person. Head lice can also survive for short times on bedding and furniture. Head lice cannot fly and they cannot jump from one person to the next. They are not transmitted from household pets or other animals. Preschool and elementary-age children, 3-11, and their families are infested most often. Girls get head lice more often than boys. Personal hygiene or cleanliness of the home has no relation to a person getting head lice.

### What to do to avoid getting lice

Instruct your children not to share combs, brushes, hats or other articles of clothing at school, play or other activities. Also for girls with long hair it is best to keep hair tied back in a ponytail, braid, etc.

### What do head lice look like?



**There are 3 forms of lice: the egg (also called a nit), the nymph, and the adult.**

**Nit:** Nits are lice eggs. They are very small and are about the size of a knot in thread. Nits are hard to see, and are often mistaken for dandruff or hair spray droplets. The difference between nits and dandruff is that nits will not flake off hair when touched as they have been firmly attached to the hair shaft by the parent louse. Nits are oval in shape. When first laid they are light in color (yellowish or gray). They darken to a tan or coffee color as the embryo develops inside the nit. Nits are laid by an adult female at the base of the hair

shaft nearest the scalp. Nits are laid on the hair and glued to one side of the hair shaft on a single strand of hair. They are firmly attached to the hair shaft and will not fall off. Nits take about 8-9 days to hatch. Eggs that are likely to hatch are usually located within 1/4 inch from the scalp. Once the egg hatches, the remaining shell (the nit) stays attached to the hair shaft, but it is clear or white. Only with a microscope or magnifying glass can you tell if a nit is alive, dead, or hatched.

**Nymph:** The nit hatches into a baby louse called a nymph. It looks like an adult head louse but is smaller in size. After hatching it takes nymphs 9-12 days to mature into adults. To survive the nymph must feed on blood.

**Adult:** The adult louse is about the size of a sesame seed. It has six legs with claws that it uses to attach to hair strands. It is tan to grayish-white in color. The adult louse will look darker in persons with dark hair. Females, are usually larger than the males, and are responsible for laying eggs. Females lay up to 8 nits per day. An adult louse can live up to 30 days on a person's head. To live and survive adult lice need to feed on blood. If the louse falls off a person, it will die within 1-2 days due to no food source. Immature lice go through three stages before they become adults. This takes another 8-9 days. 1 pregnant adult female can produce enough offspring to cause an infestation within a month.

#### **Where are head lice most commonly found?**

They are most often found on the scalp, behind the ears and near the neckline at the back of the neck. Head lice hold on to hair with hook-like claws found at the end of each of their six legs. To survive head lice require the warm, humid environment of the human scalp.

#### **What are the signs and symptoms of head lice infestation?**

- Tickling feeling of something moving in the hair, neck, or behind ears.
- Itching that is caused by an allergic reaction to the bites of the lice.
- Irritability.
- Sores on the head caused by scratching.

#### **Treatment**

When head lice are discovered the person needs to seek treatment. There are over-the-counter lice shampoos available at your local pharmacy. Follow directions listed on the label. After shampooing it is imperative that you begin nit removal. Nits are not all destroyed by the shampoos. The shampoo treatments mentioned above will not remove nits from the head. This leaves the possibility of a nit hatching and a live louse again laying eggs. Without diligent attention paid to nit removal the lice cycle will continue. To remove nits grasp a hair strand and slide the nit down the hair shaft and then dispose the nit. Some tips on nit removal are:

have clean, tangle-free hair, wet hair is easier to separate into sections –

use a bright light, especially natural light that will help view the hair strands -

use a magnifying glass or magnifying glasses to help find the nits

**Laundering**—Wash all bedding, towels and recently worn clothing in hot, soapy water in a washing machine. Using a dryer will also kill both lice and nits.

**Vacuuming**--Vacuum all carpets, pillows, mattresses and overstuffed furniture. Vacuum the car seats. All items that are not washable- such as stuffed animals and pillows, can be stored in tightly sealed plastic bags for two weeks.

**Combs and Brushes**- All combs and brushes should be soaked for 15 minutes in very hot water or disposed.

#### **Returning to School**

Prior to your child's return to school, please arrange to be checked and cleared by the school nurse.

Your child having lice can be a stressful time. If you have any concerns or questions please call the Health Office and/or your child's pediatrician.