

HEAD LICE (pediculosis)

Incubation, Signs and Symptoms

Incubation Period: The nits (eggs) of lice may hatch in 1 week. Sexual maturity is reached approximately 8-10 days after hatching.

Signs and Symptoms: Infestation of the head and hairy parts of the body with adult lice, larvae and nits. This results in itching and irritation of the scalp and skin. Female lice are generally the size of a sesame seed. Eggs or nits are tiny tan or pearl-gray specks that attach to the hair shaft close to the scalp.

Methods of Transmission

Transmission occurs almost exclusively by contact with an infested person. Transmission can occur from sharing hats, combs and brushes, or by other articles recently in contact with the head of an infested person. Lice DO NOT jump or fly. Hair length does not influence infestation.

Minimum Control Measures

Communicable Period: From time of infestation until after completion of initial treatment.

Control: On the day of diagnosis, the person infested with head lice should be allowed to remain in class or in day care, but should be discouraged from close direct contact with others. This is because an individual with a head lice infestation has likely had the infestation for several days or weeks, and at this point poses little risk to others. The child's parent or guardian should be notified that day by telephone or a note sent home with the child at the end of the school day stating that prompt, proper treatment of this condition is in the best interest of the child and his or her classmates.

Once home the individual with an active head lice infestation should be EXCLUDED from attendance until after first treatment with a medicated head lice product, such as pyrethrin (Rid® and others).

Parents of affected children should be notified and informed that their child must be properly treated before returning to school on the day after treatment. Person *must* be retreated in 7-10 days in order to kill remaining nits. Follow the manufacturer's directions carefully. Remove the nits by using a fine-tooth comb. The nits can be loosened before combing by applying a damp towel to the scalp for 30 to 60 minutes, or by soaking the hair with white vinegar followed by applying a damp towel to the scalp for 30 to 60 minutes. Commercial rinses containing 8% formic acid may also be used to loosen the nits. All products must be used according to the manufacturer's directions. Lice cannot live away from the host for more than 48 hours. Eggs do not survive away from the scalp for more than 7 days. Thoroughly vacuum the environment including furniture. Insecticide sprays have not been proven useful. Laundering washable items in hot water and/or using the hottest drying cycle will destroy lice and nits. Non-washable items, such as stuffed toys, may be dry cleaned or placed in tightly sealed plastic bags for 10 days in order to destroy nits. Soak combs and brushes in hot water for 10 minutes or wash with pediculicide shampoo.

Other Information

Lindane-containing compounds (Kwell) should not be used on infants or small children or by women who are pregnant or nursing. When a child is found with head lice, all contacts and family members of the child should be examined carefully. Those infested should be treated.