

Town of Fairfield School Health Program

HEAD LICE FACT SHEET

What are head lice?

Also called pediculosis capitis, head lice are parasitic insects found on the heads of people. Head lice do not carry disease.

What do head lice look like?

The adult louse is about the size of a sesame seed, has 6 legs, and is tan to grayish-white. Adult lice can live up to 30 days on a person's head. To live, lice need to feed on blood. A louse that falls off a person cannot live for more than 2 days.

Female lice lay eggs called nits. The nits are hard to see and are often confused with dandruff or hair spray droplets. Nits are found firmly attached to the hair shaft and cannot be washed or brushed off like dirt or dandruff. Nits are oval and usually yellow to white. They hatch about one week after they are laid and mature into adult lice about 7 days after hatching.

Who is at risk for getting head lice?

Head lice can crawl but do not jump or fly. The condition has nothing to do with cleanliness. The main mode of transmission is contact with a person who is already infested (i.e., head to head contact). Contact is common during play (sports activities, playgrounds, at camp, and slumber parties). Anyone can get head lice, but they are more common among school-aged children. Head lice spread more easily among children 3 to 12 years of age because they share their belongings more often than adults and play closely together.

What are the symptoms of head lice infestation?

- Itching caused by a reaction to the bites.
- Tickling feeling of something moving in the hair.
- Small red bumps or sores on the scalp, neck and shoulders caused by scratching. These sores can sometimes become infected.
- Some people have no symptoms.

Who should be treated for head lice infestation?

Persons with active head lice infestation should be treated according to your physicians instructions. **Only those infested should be treated.**