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HEAD LICE FACT SHEET FOR PARENTS

Each year head lice affects approximately 6 to 12 million children between the ages of 3 and 12 years of age, and about 1 in every 100 elementary school children and siblings.

WHAT IS HEAD LICE?

Head lice are parasites that are generally found on the scalp, around the ears, and at the back of the neck. The adult louse is about the size of a sesame seed, and can be the color of your child's hair. Nymphs are baby lice that grow into adults. Eggs, or nits, are smaller and silver in color and attach themselves to the hair shaft. They do not jump or fly. Head lice move by crawling.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF HEAD LICE?

The most common symptom of head lice is itching and head scratching, particularly at night. Red bite marks or sores may also be noticed on the scalp. If you suspect your child has head lice, he or she should be examined by a medical professional such as a school nurse.

HOW DO YOU GET HEAD LICE?

Head lice are not particle to one group. It can infest all socioeconomic groups, races, gender and ages.

Head lice are not a sign of poor hygiene and they do not transmit disease. Spread from one child to another can occur during direct head to head contact or by sharing of personal items such as combs, brushes, headphones, hats, caps or helmets.

It is important to talk to your child and reinforce that sharing of personal items should not be done.

If someone in your child's class has head lice, there is no reason to panic and automatically assume your child will "catch" it. It is important to talk to your child and reinforce that sharing of personal items should not be done.

HOW DO TREAT HEAD LICE?

Safe and effective products to treat head lice are available both over the counter and by doctor's prescription. It is important to follow the directions carefully to ensure that the treatment is effective.

It is also important to remove all the nits from the hair after the treatment. It takes time and patience. Be sure to use a fine tooth comb (that usually comes with the treatment), but do not use the same comb for everyone in the household.

After the treatment has been given, have your child change his/her clothes, put clothing in a plastic bag and wash them as soon as possible. You can check your child's scalp weekly when the hair is wet to see if there are any new head lice.

Parents should also wash in hot water or dry-clean all recently worn clothing, hats, used bedding, and towels. Be sure vacuum floors, rugs and cloth furnishings, car seats and head rests. Personal care items such as combs, brushes and hair clips should also be washed in hot water. Toys, such as stuffed animals, can be put into a tightly closed plastic bag for 14 days or placed in a hot dryer for 30 minutes to kill the lice.

If you have any further questions, you can consult with your school nurse, health care provider or visit the Center for Disease Control website at: www.cdc.gov.