Head Lice

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The Learner Will Be Able To..

• Identify the various stages of head lice

• Recall three signs and symptoms of head lice

• Describe two ways head lice are transmitted

• List two treatment opportunities
Public Health Problem..

Lice Are Not A Public Health Problem

While Head Lice Are A Nuisance, They DO NOT Spread Disease

Source: Centers For Disease Control &
Dr. Richard Pollack
Harvard School Of Public Health
Public Health Problem..

- The greatest harm associated with head lice results from the well-intentioned but misguided use of caustic or toxic substances to eliminate the lice. (Pollack)
What Are Head Lice?

• Head lice (Pediculus capitis) are small insects that can live on the scalp and neck hair of a human host.

• Approximately 6 to 12 million children are infected with head lice per year (CDC).

• Head lice are not a health hazard or a sign of uncleanliness and are NOT responsible for the spread of ANY diseases.

• All groups of people can develop head lice.
Head Lice Information

- In the United States, infestation with head lice is most common among preschool children attending child care, elementary schoolchildren, and the household members of infested children.

- One should expect about one infested child in a school group of 100 children in the kindergarten through 4th grades (Pollack).

- African Americans have fewer cases of head lice due to oval-shaped hair shafts which are harder for lice to grasp.
Head Lice Information..

• Lice seem to prefer red or brown hair over blonde or black hair

• Lice development has no connection with the length of hair or the frequency of brushing or shampooing
Nits/Eggs..

- Nits are lice eggs laid by the adult female head louse at the base of the hair shaft nearest the scalp.

- Nits are firmly attached to the hair shaft and are oval-shaped and very small (about the size of a knot in thread) and hard to see.

- Nits often appear yellow or white although live nits sometimes appear to be the same color as the hair of the infested person.

- Nits are often confused with dandruff, scabs, or hair spray droplets.
Nits/Eggs..

- Nits usually take about 8-9 days to hatch

- Eggs that are likely to hatch are usually located no more than ¼ inch from the base of the hair shaft

- After hatching, the remaining shell looks white or clear and continues to be firmly attached to the hair shaft

- This is the stage when it's easiest to spot them, as the hair is growing longer and the egg shell is moving further away from the scalp
Nymphs...

• A nymph is an immature louse that hatches from the nit

• A nymph looks like an adult head louse, but is smaller

• To live, a nymph must feed on blood

• Nymphs mature into adults about 9-12 days after hatching from the nit
Adult...

- The fully grown and developed adult louse is about the size of a sesame seed, has six legs, and is tan to grayish-white in color.

- Adult head lice may look darker in persons with dark hair than in persons with light hair.

- To survive, adult head lice must feed on blood.

- An adult head louse can live about 30 days on a person's head but will die within one or two days if it falls off a person.

- Adult female head lice are usually larger than males and can lay about six eggs each day.
Head Lice Transmission

- Head lice move by crawling; they cannot hop or fly

- Head lice are spread by direct contact with the hair of an infested person

- **Anyone** who comes in head-to-head contact with someone who already has head lice is at greatest risk

- Sharing clothing, bed linens, combs, brushes, and hats can also help pass them along

- **Personal hygiene or cleanliness in the home or school has nothing to do with getting head lice**
Where Are Head Lice Found?

• Head lice and head lice nits are found almost exclusively on the scalp, particularly around and behind the ears and near the neckline at the back of the head.

• Head lice or nits sometimes are found on the eyelashes or eyebrows but this is uncommon.

• Head lice hold tightly to hair with hook-like claws at the end of each of their six legs.

• Nits are cemented firmly to the hair shaft and can be difficult to remove even after the nymphs hatch and empty casings remain.
What Are They Symptoms?

• Tickling feeling of something moving in the hair

• Itching, caused by an allergic reaction to the bites of the head louse

• Irritability and difficulty sleeping; head lice are most active in the dark

• Sores on the head caused by scratching.

• These sores can sometimes become infected with bacteria found on the person's skin
Diagnosis Of Head Lice.

• The diagnosis of a head lice infestation is best made by finding a live nymph or adult louse on the scalp or hair of a person.

• Because nymphs and adult lice are very small, move quickly, and avoid light, they can be difficult to find.

• Use of a magnifying lens and a fine-toothed comb may be helpful to find live lice.

• If crawling lice are not seen, finding nits firmly attached within a ¼ inch of base of the hair shafts strongly suggests, but does not confirm, that a person is infested and should be treated.
Diagnosis Of Head Lice..

- Nits that are attached more than ¼ inch from the base of the hair shaft are almost always dead or already hatched.

- Nits are often confused with other things found in the hair such as dandruff, hair spray droplets, and dirt particles.

- If no live nymphs or adult lice are seen, and the only nits found are more than ¼-inch from the scalp, the infestation is probably old and no longer active and does not need to be treated.
Treatment Of Head Lice...

• Treatment for head lice is recommended for persons diagnosed with an active infestation

• **All household members** and other close contacts should be checked two-three days; those persons with evidence of an active infestation should be treated

• Retreatment of head lice usually is recommended
Examples Of Treatments:

- Insecticides
- Mechanical Removal
- Enzyme Treatments
- Antibiotics
- Suffocation Agents
- Heat/Cold Treatments
- Haircut

Before **ANY** treatment contact a pharmacist or your healthcare provider.
At Home...

- Hats, scarves, pillow cases, bedding, clothing, and towels worn or used by the infested person in the 2-day period just before treatment is started can be **machine washed** and dried using the **hot water** and **hot air** cycles because lice and eggs are killed by exposure for 5 minutes to temperatures greater than 53.5°C (128.3°F)

- Items that cannot be laundered may be **dry-cleaned** or **sealed in a plastic bag for two weeks**
At Home

- Items such as hats, grooming aids, and towels that come in contact with the hair of an infested person **SHOULD NOT** be shared.

- Vacuuming furniture and floors can remove an infested person's hairs that might have viable nits attached.

- Pets can **NOT** transmit lice and **SHOULD NOT** be treated.
It is the position of the National Association of School Nurses that the management of pediculosis should **NOT** disrupt the education process.

- **Children found with live head lice should remain in class, but be discouraged from close direct head contact with others**

- The school nurse should contact the parents to discuss treating the child at the conclusion of the school day.

- **Classroom-wide or school-wide screening is not merited**

Source: NASN
Prevention..

- **AVOID** head-to-head contact during play at school and at home

- **DO NOT** share clothing, such as hats, scarves, coats, sports uniforms and hair ribbons

- **DO NOT** share infested combs, brushes or towels

- **DO NOT** lie on beds, couches, pillows, carpets or stuffed animals that have been in contact with an infected person

- Talk with your child about not sharing clothing with anyone
Lice And Schools..

• No-nit policies developed by school systems were established in response to the stigma and unclear transmission of lice

• The National Association of School Nurses (NASN) states that children who have been treated for lice **SHOULD NOT** be excluded from school because of the existence of residual nits (NASN)

• According to the **American Academy of Pediatrics**, no-nit policies in schools are a detrimental cause of lost time in the classroom
Lice And Schools..

- Children with an active head lice infestation are likely to have had the infestation for at least a **month** by the time it is discovered.

- A child with active head lice have **NO immediate risk to others** and **SHOULD** be allowed to remain in school for the day.

- Lice transmission in school is **LOW**, due to close head-to-head contact which is **LOW** and generally does not happen in the school setting.
Lice And Schools..

- Case of head lice be brought to the school’s attention, the school nurse will **MAINTAIN confidentiality** of the student’s identity (FERPA)

- Screening entire classrooms is an **unjustified** response (Pollack)

- Parents of students found to have **LIVE** lice should be contacted by the school nurse and advised of treatment options

- Children **SHOULD NOT** be sent home for head lice
Lice And Schools..

- **NO** notification needs to be sent home to classmates parents

- Insecticides in the school are not warranted and provide unnecessary chemical exposure
Questions..
Source:

- Centers For Disease Control and Prevention
- HeadLice.org
- Kids Health
- Mayo Clinic
- Medline Plus
- National Association Of School Nurses
- Pollack, Richard., Harvard School Of Public Health