

# Health Alert: Lice

The head louse, or *Pediculus humanus capitis*, is a parasitic insect that can be found on the head, eyebrows, and eyelashes of people. Head lice feed on human blood several times a day and live close to the human scalp. Head lice are not known to spread disease.

Infestation with head lice is most common among preschool children attending childcare, elementary schoolchildren, and the household members of infested children. The insects usually spread through direct transfer from the hair of one person to the hair of another. Both over-the-counter and prescription medications are available for the treatment of lice infestations.

For those who may not have experienced lice before, we know that there are sometimes misperceptions about who gets lice, how, and why. Lice do not differentiate between clean homes and dirty homes, clean heads, and dirty heads. In fact, there is no correlation between lice infestation and the sanitation of the home or school settings. Lice are transmitted head-to-head in the course of daily life. Since children play and learn in close proximity to each other, it is inevitable that they are often transmitters of lice.

*If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact us at [Schoolhealth@onenessfamily.org](mailto:Schoolhealth@onenessfamily.org).*

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

- 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.

If your child exhibits any of the following symptoms, please check their hair thoroughly for lice and nits. If you discover lice, do call the families of your child's close friends as well as email [schoolhealth@onenessfamily.org](mailto:schoolhealth@onenessfamily.org). Together, we can ensure that the problem is contained in a discreet and supportive way.

## **Treatment of Lice**

There are non-toxic approaches that can be used in conjunction with the pharmaceutical approaches, such as shampoos with tea tree oil, which may discourage lice. While the pharmaceutical product must be used to kill the lice, Licenex, a non-toxic shampoo

treatment from MicroNutra Health, loosens the nits making it easier to comb them out, and can be used after the pharmaceutical approach. However, these products will not get rid of lice once they are found; the pharmaceutical product will still need to be used.

In addition, here is the website and the phone number of a local company that aids in eradicating lice.

[www.adviceonlicemd.com](http://www.adviceonlicemd.com) or call 240-242-4267.

Potomac Lice Lady - Potomaclifelady.com or call 240-390-6487

### **Here are some things that parents can do to minimize the risk of getting lice:**

1. Tie back or braid long hair before sending your child to school if there is a notice of lice in your child's classroom or among their friends.
2. Encourage your child to wear a kerchief, cap, or head covering during times when lice have been found in the classroom. This simple step can make a big difference for your family.
3. If your child is on a sports team, make sure that he or she wears only her own cap or helmet. Batting or football helmets are a good example of how lice may be spread during times of infestation.
4. Increase vacuuming and changes of sheets at home during periods when lice have been reported, particularly if you have had overnight visitors in your home.
5. If your child is going to attend an overnight play date, send your own pillow and pillowcase and wash it when the child returns home, especially when lice have been reported. Do tie back the child's hair. A simple braid or ponytail will reduce risk. Consider checking ahead of time to make sure that lice have not been an issue for the host family. While it's an uncomfortable question to ask, it's an easier conversation than calling the same family to report that your child has picked up lice!
6. Check your child's head every few days if you've heard a report of lice in the classroom. Look out for scratching at the back of the neck, above the hairline. Children may work with heads close together or may share clothing without teachers realizing it. Do be alert and let us know if you think your child may have lice. Please ask your child's teacher or in the school office for a lesson on how to check for lice. We'd be glad to confirm if you are concerned one way or the other.