

## ***ALERT LETTER – HEAD LICE / NITS***

Dear Parents:

We share a concern for your child's well being. For this reason we want to inform you that a case of head lice has been detected in the school.

Below are some common questions and attached is more information as well as treatment options. Please feel free to contact our local health unit if you have further questions (250-443-3150).

### ***“What are the facts about head lice?”***

Lice are tiny wingless, flat-backed insects that live on the hair and scalp. They are grayish white and have strong legs and claws that help them hold onto hair. Lice are common and spread by crawling from head to head. They are easily transmitted because they multiply so rapidly. One female may lay 140 eggs (nits) in her 30-day lifespan. Young lice hatch in about 10 days, and reach maturity in another 10 days. Head lice feed on the blood of their host, much like mosquitoes. They need a warm 30°C environment. That's why they live on the head, the warmest part of the body. Adult lice can only survive away from the body for about 48 hours at room temperature.

### ***“How do you catch them?”***

Lice are transmitted through close contact. Common sources of spreading include the sharing of personal items like combs, brushes, towels, earphones, hats, stuffed toys, pillows and clothing.

### ***“How do I know if my child has lice?”***

Persistent itching is the most common sign. There may also be a rash on the scalp. In severe cases, glands in the neck and underarms may be swollen. If you are unsure, check your child's head for lice. Separate the hair in 8-10 places and look for redness of the scalp. The mature louse moves quickly and is so small (1-2 mm) that it is not often seen.

You should also look for nits. Often the first and only sign of lice, nits are tiny pearly-coloured and egg-shaped like teardrops. Lice attach their eggs to the hair with very strong glue. They are generally found close to the scalp, around the ears and at the back of the neck. Nits and dandruff may look alike, but dandruff is easily removed, while nits are not. Don't panic if you do find lice and nits. They are not a danger to your child's health – just a nuisance.

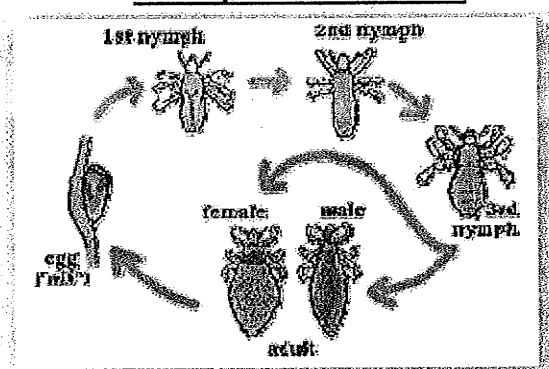
### ***“What should I do if my child has lice?”***

First, be sure to inform teachers, babysitters, family members and parents of your child's playmates so they can be sure to check their children's heads. This courtesy will also help prevent your child from getting them again after he or she has been cleared. Next, follow a recommended treatment (see attached).

## HEAD LICE FACTS

- Head lice do not spread disease.
- Head lice are tiny insects about the size of a sesame seed and can vary from white to brown in color.
- Head lice live only on a person's head and can only survive 1-2 days away from the scalp.
- Head lice do not jump or fly.
- Head lice can move quickly on dry hair, so they are difficult to see.
- Head lice bites can make the scalp itchy (but not always).

### Life Cycle of Head Lice



Permission requested from [www.headlice.org](http://www.headlice.org)

To see head lice photos click here: [www.hsph.harvard.edu/headlice.html](http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/headlice.html)

- Adult head lice lay about 5-6 eggs (called nits) every day. These nits are glued to the hair very close to the scalp (within 6mm or ¼ inch).
- It takes 7-10 days for the nits to hatch into a nymph.
- It takes 7-10 days for a nymph to become an adult. During that time, it stays on the head, but does not lay eggs.
- You can find nits anywhere on the head especially behind the ears or on the back of the neck.
- You can't get rid of nits by brushing, or with a hair dryer.
- After the head lice hatch, the shell of the nit stays glued to the hair. If it is more than 6 mm or ¼ inch away from the scalp, it is probably empty.
- You can get head lice by touching heads with someone who has head lice, or by sharing combs, brushes and hats.
- Head lice are common where children play or work closely together.

## HEAD LICE TREATMENT

### TWO ACCEPTABLE TREATMENT OPTIONS\*\*

#### OPTION A:

#### Head Lice Shampoo- Creams-Rinses

**Kill the Head Lice  
&  
Remove the Nits**  
(within ¼ inch of scalp)

Special head lice products are used because they have been tested and determined to be a safe and effective treatment

#### OPTION B:

#### Wet-Combing

**Remove the Head Lice  
&  
Forget the Nits**

A non-chemical way to find and eliminate head lice.

Wet combing with hair conditioner immobilizes the lice.

*Note: the research to support this method is unclear but many people say it works*

**\*\*Do not combine treatment options as this can reduce effectiveness**

**OPTION A  
HEAD LICE  
SHAMPOO/CREAM/RINSE**

**Kill the Head Lice and Remove the Nits**

This option involves using two applications of a chemical head lice shampoo, cream or rinse, 7 to 10 days apart. The product kills the lice on the head but may not kill all of the nits therefore the nits need to be removed using a special "nit" comb or with your fingers. Head lice products should only be used during active infestations.

**Ask your pharmacists about head lice products.**

**STEPS TO FOLLOW**

DO	REMEMBER
<p>1. <b>Check the heads</b> of all family members. Check hair, especially behind ears and back of neck for lice eggs (nits) – look for white to light brown oval specks "glued" to the strands of hair, very close (within 6mm or ¼ inch) to the scalp.</p>	<p>1. If one person in the family has head lice, there is an increased chance that other family members have head lice too. Dandruff can be flicked off the hair; nits are glued to the hair. Use good lighting when doing head checks.</p>
<p>2. <b>Only</b> family members with live head lice or live nits should be treated. <b>Carefully read and follow directions of the head lice product.</b> Do not use conditioners for 1 week following treatment.</p>	<p>2. Unless you treat all family members who have head lice at the same time, head lice can be passed on from one person to another when heads touch. Conditioners can reduce the effectiveness of treatment.</p>
<p>3. <b>Remove nits (within ¼ inch of scalp)</b> Gently use "nit" comb (metal works best) or use your fingers to pull nits from the single strands of hair. Rinse nit comb or fingers in a sink or bowl of warm water and wipe dry after each stroke.</p>	<p>3. Metal nit combs are available at your local pharmacy. If the nit comb tugs the hair, it may be upside down. <i>Experts differ in their opinion on the need to remove nits. Nit removal is included as it helps ensure less eggs will hatch, thereby improving the effectiveness of the treatment.</i></p>
<p>4. <b>Wash</b> clothing worn in the past 2 – 3 days, bed sheets and pillowcases and then dry in the <u>hot</u> cycle of the dryer. If articles cannot be washed in hot water or dried on a hot cycle in the drier, put the items in a sealed plastic bag for 10 days or place the sealed bag in the freezer for 48 hours.</p>	<p>4. There is <b>no</b> evidence that a major clean up of the house is necessary to get rid of head lice. <b>It is more important to treat the head lice and remove the nits.</b> Only items that have been in direct contact with the affected person need to be washed e.g. shirts, jackets, hats, towels, combs, brushes.</p>
<p>5. <b>Treat a second time</b> 7 – 10 days later. Repeat step 3.</p>	<p>5. A second treatment will make sure that any head lice, which hatch after the first treatment, will be killed before they have a chance to lay any eggs. Two treatments and a follow-up check of the head with nit removal for 2-3 weeks is the best way to make sure head lice are gone.</p>
<p>6. If live head lice or new nits are found consult your Public Health Nurse or try Option B Wet Combing.</p>	<p>6. Wet combing breaks the life cycle of head lice by removing them before they are grown and able to reproduce.</p>

## OPTION B WET COMBING

### Remove the Head Lice and Forget the Nits

This option is cheap and safe but is time consuming and requires that the steps be followed **carefully and completely**. Wet combing is based on the life cycle of head lice. It focuses on removing the live head lice and does not require removing the nits from the head although some people still choose to remove the nits. Combing treatments are done every 3 – 4 days over a two-week period. This breaks the life cycle of head lice by removing them before they are fully-grown and able to reproduce

**Talk to your Public Health Nurse if you require further information.**

#### STEPS TO FOLLOW

DO	REMEMBER
1. <b>Wash</b> hair with ordinary shampoo and rinse.	1. Note: On average, a wet combing session takes about ½ hour per person.
2. <b>Apply</b> at least ½ cup of conditioner (any brand) to thoroughly saturate the hair. Use more if long hair. Do not rinse out the conditioner.	2. Untangle hair with a regular wide tooth comb. Wet conditioner will immobilize the lice.
3. <b>Comb</b> sections of hair using a “nit” comb (metal works best). Divide hair into small sections. Firmly draw the comb from the scalp to the end of the hair. After each stroke, rinse the comb in a sink or bowl of warm water, and wipe dry. Continue section by section until the entire head is done. Make sure hair stays wet during combing with conditioner.	3. Metal nit combs are available at your local pharmacy. If the nit comb tugs the hair, it may be upside down.
4. <b>Rinse</b> hair. Leave hair dripping wet. Repeat Step 3 combing <u>without conditioner</u> , until no lice are found.	4. Check the comb and your fingernails for head lice (you don't want to give them a ride back to the head).
5. <b>Repeat</b> Step 1 – 4 every 3 – 4 days for two weeks.	5. Wet combing breaks the life cycle of head lice by removing them before they are full grown and able to reproduce.
6. After two weeks of wet combing if live head lice or new nits are found, try Option A Head Lice Shampoo or talk to your Public Health Nurse.	

#### DAYS TO WET COMB

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14

## ALTERNATIVE TREATMENTS

There is not enough scientific evidence to support the use of the following methods, therefore Interior Health does not recommend them as treatment options.

- ◆ Olive oil
- ◆ Mineral oil
- ◆ Vinegar
- ◆ Mayonnaise
- ◆ Melted Butter
- ◆ Vaseline
- ◆ Robi comb
- ◆ Follicel
- ◆ Cetaphil
- ◆ Shaving Gel
- ◆ Garlic
- ◆ Enzyme Treatments

## UNDESIRABLE REMEDIES or DANGEROUS METHODS DO NOT USE

The following treatments are not effective and/or not safe.

Insect Sprays (Raid)  
Oil (WD40)  
Gasoline  
Flea Soap  
Alcohol

Dyes  
Bleaches  
Chinese Chalk  
Heat Directly on Scalp  
Kerosene

Essential Oils (Pine, Tea Tree, Thyme, Rosemary, Eucalyptus, Chick Chack etc....) are not recommended due to limited scientific evidence and possible toxicity concerns.

\*\*Shaving the head is not recommended as a treatment strategy.