



Student Health Center UNC Wilmington

INSTRUCTION SHEET: HEAD LICE

The Student Health Provider has diagnosed head lice. Head lice are tiny insects, about the size of a pinhead. They live mainly on the scalp (head hair), though they are occasionally found on beards or eyebrows.

Head lice live only on humans, not on other animals. The lice bite through skin and, like mosquitoes, feed on blood. The bites cause intense itching. Unlike mosquito or tick bites, bites of head lice are not known to cause diseases.

Head lice also attach tiny white eggs, known as nits, to the base of hairs. The eggs are often easier to see than the lice themselves.

Infection with head lice occurs by direct contact (touching), or by contact with contaminated hats, combs, clothes, bedding, or furniture. Epidemics often occur among schoolchildren.

The key to treatment of head lice is medicine applied to the scalp to kill the lice and eggs. After treatment, the lice and nits are dead, even if the nits remain: A student can return to school promptly.

MEASURES YOU SHOULD TAKE TO HELP TREAT HEAD LICE:

- 1- Use the shampoo that your provider prescribes or recommends. Be sure to carefully follow the instructions enclosed with the shampoo.
- 2- All dirty clothes/bedding/towels should be washed in hot water at the same time the shampoo is used. Combs and brushes should be washed in hot, soapy water for 15 minutes. Hot water washing kills mites and eggs.
- 3- Realize that itching may continue for several days after treatment. The shampoo kills the mites, but inflammation already in the skin must resolve before the itching goes away. Diphenhydramine (Benadryl) can be taken by mouth for symptomatic relief of itching.
- 4- One application of shampoo is usually curative. However, if necessary, a second course can be applied in two to seven days. Do not repeat the treatment before at least two days, and do not repeat the treatment more than once without consulting a doctor.
- 5- Some infectious disease experts recommend that all family members and sexual contacts of an infected person be treated simultaneously. Others recommend treating only those persons who are obviously infected with lice.
- 6- To prevent reinfection, be careful not to share hats, combs, brushes, or clothes.