

Head Lice: Who's Responsibility Are They?

Head Lice

Head lice or the medical condition known as pediculosis, are a pesky problem that anyone can have at some point in their life.

Head lice are not dangerous and they do not spread disease but they can and do spread from person to person.

Infection is common during school holidays as well as during the school year. Parents start to worry more about lice when children go back to school because they think the lice are being caught there.

Research indicates that most lice are caught from close family and friends in the home and community, not just from the school.

Head louse infection is a problem of the whole community, not just the schools. Co-ordinated efforts between parents, teachers, schools, public health and the community are necessary to control outbreaks of head lice.

Role and Responsibilities

Parents' Role:

- Be aware of the signs and the symptoms of infestation;
- Be familiar with the technique for examining hair for lice and nits;
- Examine their children's heads weekly for signs of infestation as part of routine hygiene;
- Notify the school when their child has lice and others who have come into contact with the child, that is, family members, neighbours, etc.;
- Carry out treatment on family members with live moving lice;
- Wash personal items such as combs, brushes, bedding and hats;
- Inform the school that treatment has been completed

School's Role:

- Schools should not take on the responsibility of checking heads for head lice as traditional methods of parting the hair and looking at the scalp is not efficient and many infestations may be missed.
- "Alert" letters should not be sent out. These can cause an "outbreak" of imaginary lice.
- Research indicates children who may have lice should not be excluded from school; if they do have lice, they will probably have been there for weeks already.
- The school should give best practice information on lice to parents and staff, including the importance of regular detection combing and how to do it. Provision of information should be on a regular basis throughout the year, not just when there is thought to be an "outbreak."

Public Health Role

- Providing Best Practice treatment guidelines to schools, to parents and community agencies upon request;
- Assisting school boards and schools to implement head lice policies and protocols;
- Consultation on difficult-to-treat cases of head lice

For more information contact:

**Your local Public Health Office
or your Physician
or
Health Link Alberta 1-866-408-5465**