**Myths and facts about head lice (Head Lice Speak Up)**

(Adapted from “Is there Lice in the Class Room?”)

**Myth 1:** The presence of head lice is a sign of poor personal hygiene **Fact:** We head lice prefer a clean scalp. It doesn’t matter to us your sex, age, race or how much money you have.

**Myth 2:** Only children get head lice. **Fact:** We like adults as much as children, but it is easier to move from one child to another because of their close contact in daycare, preschools or schools.

**Myth 3:** If your head isn’t itchy, you don’t have lice. **Fact:** Contrary to common thinking, we may be in your hair for weeks or months without making you itch. In fact, even though we are in your hair, only 1/3 of you will scratch.

**Myth 4:** Long hair encourages infestation. **Fact:** We are more interested in your scalp than your hair so cutting your hair will not get rid of us.

**Myth 5:** Head lice can be “caught” from plants, pets and other animals. **Fact:** I can live on YOU, but I can’t live on your plants, pets or other animals.

**Myth 6:** Head lice can jump and fly from one person to another. **Fact:** We don’t have wings. We can’t jump, but we can run quickly from one head to another “wherever and whenever heads meet.” We may hide in hats and other headgear, scarves, hair accessories, helmets, head phones, etc. We can only survive for 48 hours away from your head.

**Myth 7:** An itchy scalp following treatments is a sign of treatment failure. **Fact:**  Your scalp may be itchy for up to 10 days after successful treatment. If your head is itchy past 10 days, it may be a sign I am still there or my friends have moved in.

**Myth 8:** Head lice cause disease. An outbreak of head lice is a public health emergency. **Fact:** I am a nuisance but I do not carry germs or spread disease.

**Myth 9:**  No-nit policies are effective in eliminating head lice. **Fact:** There is no evidence that shows no-nit policies reduce head lice infestations. Nits are removed to enhance the effectiveness of treatment, but should not be a reason to keep a child out of school.

**Myth 10:** The presence of nits means an active infestation. **Fact:** 10-30% of children with nits never develop an active infestation.

**Treatment Options**

(Adapted from BC Health File 06)

Treatment should be considered only if head lice or live nits are found. Head lice will not go away without treatment. If one person in the family has head lice, there is a good chance other family members do as well. Check all family members and treat those who have head lice all at the same time. This will help to make sure head lice are properly treated and will not spread.

**Chemical treatments**

Non-prescription medications: Shampoos, creams and rinses that contain an ingredient that kills lice are available at most pharmacies without a prescription. Follow exactly the directions for use on the label.

After treatment comb the hair well with your fingers or a special head lice comb to remove all nits or eggs. **Thorough combing is just as important as the use of the medication.**

The treatment may need to be repeated in 7 to 10 days. Itching may last for seven to 10 days, even after successful treatment.

**Non-Chemical treatments**

Wet-combing: This method removes live head lice. Wet-combing is cheap and safe but takes time to complete. The combing steps must be followed carefully and completely. Combing treatments are done using generous amounts of hair conditioner and a special lice comb, every three to four days for a two-week period. Any young lice that hatch from eggs after the first session are removed at the second, third and fourth sessions. This is why it is important to do the full four sessions. *(Simonds PAC has purchased 4 combs for wet combing. Please see the office to borrow.)*

**Treatment methods not recommended**

Methods and products that should not be used because they are either not safe or do not work include: insect sprays, motor oil, gasoline, alcohol, flea soap, dyes, bleaches, heat applied to the scalp, garlic, essential oils, and shaving the head.

**What should be cleaned?**

Head lice do not survive for long once they are off the scalp. Head lice do not pose a risk to others through contact with furniture or carpets. There is no evidence that a major cleaning of the house or car is necessary.

On the day you start the treatment, wash all dirty clothes, bedding, towels, brushes and combs in hot water. Items that cannot be washed, for example pillows or stuffed animals, can be placed in a plastic bag for ten days or in the freezer for 48 hours. A child's car seat may be vacuumed as a precaution.

**References**

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