



NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Head Lice Treatment and Control

Children who are otherwise healthy should not be kept home from school due to head lice. By the time diagnosis is made, the child has likely had lice infestation for a month or more and is of little risk to others.

Head lice are tiny insects that live in hairy parts of the body, normally the head. They do **not** carry diseases and are **not** a result of poor hygiene. They cause itching and are mainly transmitted from one person to another by head-to-head contact. Contrary to popular belief, it is uncommon for objects such as clothing, hats, or combs to transmit lice. One study showed that only four percent (4%) of pillowcases used by infested persons actually carried live lice.

Lice do not hop or jump; they can only crawl. Pets do not transmit lice. In most cases, transmission of lice occurs by direct contact between two persons' heads. Contagion in classrooms has been shown to be very low.

Prompt treatment is the best way to prevent transmission to others. Professor John Bowman of the Rangel College of Pharmacy, Texas A&M Health Science Center comments, "Over the counter medications such as Permethrin crème rinse 1% (Nix®) are safe, effective, available without a prescription, and inexpensive." Permethrin crème is applied to damp hair that has been shampooed with a non-conditioning shampoo and then towel dried. The product is left on for ten (10) minutes and then rinsed off. It will kill lice and their eggs for at least two (2) weeks. Because shampoos generally include additives such as silicone, the residual effect of permethrin could be impaired. A repeat application is recommended nine (9) days after initial treatment, and particularly if live lice are seen.

Over-the-Counter Medications

- Pyrethrins combined with piperonyl butoxide (Rid® Shampoo, Rid® Foam, A-200® Shampoo).
- Permethrin lotion, 1% (Nix® Crème Rinse).

Head lice lay eggs that are called nits. Nits are firmly attached to hairs very close to the scalp. Often, the nits contain a pigment that makes them difficult to see. Professor Bowman notes, "The empty egg casings appear white and are easier to see; people often mistake these for unhatched eggs and wrongly conclude that prior treatment was ineffective." While the hair is still damp after treatment, nits should be manually removed with a fine-toothed comb. Although little evidence is available showing benefits of manual removal, having extended parent-child time is valuable, and removing visible nits decreases social stigma the child might experience. Other methods of nit removal involving application of various substances should be avoided. Do not use different head lice drugs at the same time unless instructed to do so by a physician or pharmacist.

Confidentiality is also important; it is usually counterproductive to alert other parents about one child's infestation.

The Regional Health Awareness Board was created by an inter-local agreement between San Patricio County, Nueces County and the City of Corpus Christi to promote dialogue on the health/welfare and environmental issues that affect our communities. For further information contact Dr. James Mobley at 361-643-4546.

<http://www.cdc.gov/parasites/lice/index.html>

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