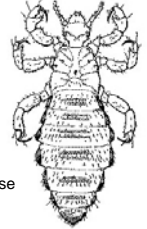

FACTS ABOUT HEAD LICE

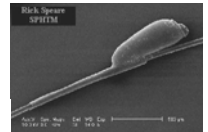
The head louse – What is it? A head louse (louse is singular of *lice*) is an insect that lives on the human scalp and feeds on blood. While feeding, lice inject saliva into the skin, which causes itching. When away from their human hosts, head lice usually die within 3 days.

Who gets lice and how? Anyone can get head lice. Lice are spread by direct contact and sharing of personal items such as combs, brushes, towels, hats and clothing. Personal cleanliness does *not* prevent you from getting head lice.



Adult Louse

Head lice infestations (pediculosis) Head lice have been known throughout history. In recent years, for reasons not entirely clear, we are seeing more people with head lice. Most people do not know what lice or nits (louse eggs) look like and do not suspect pediculosis when they find themselves scratching their heads. Delays in treatment allow the lice to increase and to spread to others. Nits hatch in 8 to 11 days.



Egg

SYMPTOMS

- *Persistent scratching of the head.*
- *Nits on the hair.* These look like tiny oval objects glued to the side of the hair shafts. Their length is less than $\frac{1}{2}$ the diameter of the head of a pin.
- *Lice among the hair.* Lice and nits are most likely to be found near the scalp where the hair is thickest, usually behind the ears and around the nap of the neck. Lice avoid the light. They grow from slightly larger than the nit up to $\frac{1}{8}$ inch in length.

Hair casts. Hair casts (material from the hair follicles) may be mistaken for nits. Both may be on the hair at the same time. A hair cast looks like a small collar or ball and slides easily along the hair shaft. Hair casts are unrelated to lice infestation.

TREATMENT

- A variety of medications containing insecticides (pediculicides) to control head lice is available over-the-counter (see reverse) or by prescription.
- Carefully follow all directions on the label.
- **Remove nits with a specially made fine-toothed comb.**

Effectiveness of pediculicides

- Not all pediculicides are fully effective against nits even when used in accordance with directions (though the label may say they will kill nits.) Unless all nits are removed after treatment, you should *re-treat on the 11th day after first treatment.*
- Head lice can become resistant to pediculicides. If treatments are unsuccessful, check whether label directions were carefully followed. If so, suspect resistance and use another pediculicide with a different active ingredient.

Check our website: www.uhs.berkeley.edu to learn more about this medical concern or others.

For an appointment www.uhs.berkeley.edu or call **510-642-2000**

Clinic Nurse **510-643-7197** for advice

▪ **TREATMENT** (*Continued*)

Signs of successful treatment

- No new nits will be laid. When first laid, nits are attached to hair near the scalp. As the hair grows, they are moved away from the scalp. By 11 days after a successful treatment, no nits will be closer than ¼ inch from the scalp.

Signs of unsuccessful treatment

- New nits will continue to appear on hair next to scalp.
 - Some people, seemingly free of lice and nits after each complete treatment, will have *repeat infestations*. This often occurs while others in the same environment (e.g., same residence) remain free of lice.
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PEDICULICIDES (*available over-the-counter prescription*)

- *Rid* (liquid with pyrethrins)
- *R & C Shampoo* (with pyrethrins)
- *Triple X* (liquid with pyrethrins)

If your symptoms continue despite use of the above medications as instructed, call for a clinician appointment.

CONTROL OF HEAD LICE ON CLOTHING, BED LINENS & FURNITURE

As a rule, only relatively small numbers of head lice will occur away from their normal host, a person. Away from their host, they will usually die in 3 days or less. Therefore, the following simple control measures are sufficient to prevent reinfestation after treating the infested persons.

- Vacuum furniture, rugs and floors. Immediately remove and wrap vacuum bag in a plastic bag and dispose.
- Wash bed linens and washable clothing in hot water (140° for 20 minutes)
- Heat dry clothing or other fabric items in a clothes dryer hot cycle (155° for 20 minutes)
- Dry clean clothing that cannot be washed or store articles for 20 days in sealed plastic bags.
- Insecticide application to objects is usually **not** necessary; most lice are on people.

Common myths about head lice dispelled

- Personal cleanliness will not prevent head lice; anyone can get them, whether clean or dirty.
 - Head lice cannot jump or fly.
 - Head lice come from another person, not from dogs, cats, or other pets.
 - Carpets and furniture are not a favorable place for lice. They do not provide the warmth, food, or moisture needed for lice to survive.
 - No solvent (vinegar, etc) will effectively dissolve the *cement* that holds nits to the hair.
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PREVENTION

- Do not use personal items belonging to others (combs, hair brushes, towels, hats, clothing, etc.)
- Learn to recognize signs of head lice infestation and check for them.
- Treat promptly when head lice are found.
- Notify others with who you have been in frequent, prolonged contact.

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