

WHAT ARE HEAD LICE?

Head lice are tiny, wingless, grayish-tan insects that live and breed in human hair. They depend on human blood for survival. Lice cannot jump or fly, as they have no wings or hind legs. They are about the size of a sesame seed with six claws that attach to the hair shaft. Head lice separated from the human host will rarely survive more than 24 hours and cannot live on family pets. The eggs, called nits, are easier to see than the lice themselves and are usually found attached to hair shafts close to the scalp behind the ears and on the back of the head. Nits cannot be washed away like dirt or dandruff; they must be removed with a special comb designed for that purpose. The eggs hatch in 7-10 days and then in another 7-10 days the young will mature and lay eggs of their own. Viable (live) nits are usually seen from the scalp up to ½ inch on the hair shaft.

HOW DO THEY SPREAD?

Most always, lice are spread via direct head-to-head contact. More hair means a more favorable breeding ground and long hair creates a “bridge of opportunity” from one head to another. Nits found on an abandoned strand of hair have a slim chance of survival, as they need the warmth of a human host to incubate and hatch.

HOW ARE THEY DETECTED?

Most often, the first clue that a child has head lice is frequent scratching of the scalp or a rash at the nape of the neck. To check for infestation, carefully examine the hair around the back of the neck and behind the ears. Since head lice shy away from light, you may only see their eggs (nits). The nits are small whitish ovals of uniform size attached to the hair shaft.

HOW ARE THEY TREATED?

Head lice infestation can be treated with an over-the-counter or prescription medication. There are several treatment options available on the market. Treatment should be considered when active lice or viable eggs are found. When this occurs, each person (adults & children) within the home should be checked to determine if live lice are present. All who are infested should be treated at the same time.