



Head Lice



Information for Schools and Day Cares



About Head Lice

Head lice are found worldwide. Infestation with head lice is most common among preschool children attending child care, elementary school children, and the household members of infested children. It is estimated that between 8 and 12 million children get head lice each year in the U.S.

Head lice are about the size of a sesame seed and can easily be seen when looking through the hair of an infested person. Head lice stay near the scalp, often behind the ears, near the neckline, and back of the head. They hold tightly to the hair with hook-like claws at the end of each of their six legs. Symptoms of head lice included itching and irritation of the scalp and surrounding skin.

Head lice cannot fly or hop, they move by crawling and are most commonly spread by direct contact with the hair or head of an infested person. While not common, head lice can be spread by wearing items such as hats, scarves, coats and hair ribbons worn by an infested person or by using the comb/brush of an infested person. Once separated from their human host, head lice and their eggs (nits) will soon die (usually in a day or so).

Head lice do not spread disease or cause disease and so the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Utah Department of Health do not recognize head lice as a reportable disease condition, but rather as a nuisance and inconvenience.



Controlling the Spread of Head Lice in a School or Day Care Setting



Current research does not support the usefulness and effectiveness of classroom or school-wide screening for decreasing the occurrence of head lice among children.

While head lice do not originate in a school or a day care, and a school or a day care cannot prevent the spread of head lice, schools and day cares should work to educate parents and staff about the transmission, recognition, and proper treatment of head lice, as well as how to make notifications of a head lice infestation.

The Utah Department of Health has educational materials available regarding the prevention and treatment of head lice. These materials can be downloaded at: www.health.utah.gov/epi/diseases/Lice.

Parents of exposed and infested children should be notified of the head lice infestation and be provided with information on how to properly check and treat their child for head lice. A child with a head lice infestation can return to school or day care the day after he/she has been properly treated for head lice. Follow-up treatment will likely be needed to kill any remaining lice eggs or nits.

“No-nits” policies that require a child to be free of nits before they can return to school (or day care) are not recommended. Utah Department of Health head lice control measures state, “Exclude from attendance until after first treatment with a medicated product...” (www.health.utah.gov/epi/cdepi/daycareschool.htm#lice).

Be sure and check with your school district to review existing head lice prevention, treatment and control policies.

For more information about head lice
call 801-538-6191 or visit www.health.utah.gov/epi

