Hamilton Health Sciences
PATIENT EDUCATION

St. Joseph's Healthcare Hamilton

Head Lice

What is it?

- Tiny bugs about the size of a pin-head that are found behind the ears and near the neckline at the back of the neck.
- You can see lice if you look closely through the hair and scalp for nits (eggs), nymphs (young lice) or adults.
- Finding a nymph or an adult may be difficult; there are usually few of them and they can move quickly from searching fingers.
- If crawling lice are not seen, finding nits within a 1/4 inch of the scalp confirms that a person has lice and should be treated.
- Lice are only found on humans. Lice are not found on cats, dogs or any other household pet.
- Lice do not have wings so they cannot fly or jump.

How is it spread?

- By direct contact with someone who has head lice. Contact is common during play at school and at home (slumber parties, sports, activities at camp or on a playground).
- By sharing personal items that have been used by a person who has lice (hair brushes, hats, sports uniforms, hair ribbons, pillows, towels and bedding).

What can be done to prevent the spread of it?

- Do not share personal items and clothing (hair brushes, hats, pillows).
- If lice are found, tell close contacts such as family members, friends and classmates so that they can be checked for lice.

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Is there treatment for it?

Yes. Use a purchased head lice product from your pharmacy. Home remedies are not recommended.

Make sure to do the following:

- Read and follow all the directions included with the purchased head lice treatment.
- Use a fine tooth comb to remove nits from the hair.
- Wash personal care items, clothing and bedding in hot soapy water and dry in a hot dryer for 20 minutes to kill lice and eggs. Dry cleaning is acceptable for items not recommended for washing.
- Seal non-washable items in a plastic bag for 2 weeks.
- Continue with regular housekeeping practices.

Lice products do not kill all of the eggs, so a second treatment 7 days after the first treatment is needed. This will kill the newly hatched lice.

Call your doctor or pharmacist before using a lice product if:

- Anyone has allergies to chrysanthemums, ragweed or synthetic pyrethroids.
- Anyone has a seizure disorder.
- You are pregnant or breastfeeding and you need treatment or you need to treat other people.
- Your child is under 2 years old.
- You find lice on the eyebrows, eyelashes or beard.
- The skin of the scalp is broken or infected.
- Head lice continues to re-occur.

For more information

Toronto Public Health

Google: Toronto Public Health Lice

Stop the spread of germs and infection. Clean your hands.	

This fact sheet provides basic general information only and is to be used as a quick guide, not as a complete resource on the subject. If you have any further questions, ask Infection Prevention & Control or your health care provider.

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PD 7010 - 06/2016
dpc/pted/HeadLice-th.doc
dt/June 3, 2016