

HEAD LICE

What are Lice?

Lice are the infestation of the head with adult lice, larvae and mites.

How is it spread?

Lice are spread by direct contact (head to head) with an infected person and by indirect contact with their personal belongings, especially shared headgear, combs and clothing. Lice from pets do not infest man, although they may be present temporarily. Personal hygiene or cleanliness in home or school has nothing to do with getting head lice.

What are the signs and symptoms?

Lice are characterized by a tickling feeling of something moving in the hair, severe itching due to allergic reaction to bites, and sores of the scalp or body which may become infected. Individuals may show signs of irritability.

What is the incubation period and how long is it communicable?

The eggs or nits of lice hatch in 7-10 days and mature 8 to 10 days after hatching. The egg to egg cycle lasts about three (3) weeks. Lice can be transferred to another person as long as lice or eggs remain alive on the infested person or in clothing. Nits remain viable for approximately one (1) month on clothing.

Can Lice be prevented?

Infestation can be avoided by the following:

- Avoid physical contact with infested individuals and their belongings, especially clothing and bedding
- Launder clothing and bedding in hot water (over 129 °F) or dry clean to destroy lice and nits.
- Dry clothes in hot clothes dryer.
- Storing clothes in plastic bag for 10 days is also effective in killing lice or nymphs.
- Regularly inspect all children for head lice and excuse those infested until treatment has been done.

What should I do about it?

Children with head lice should not return to school/daycare until they are clear of both lice and nits.

Several medicated shampoos are available for treatment and should be used as directed.

- Following the shampoo, it is necessary to comb the hair thoroughly using a specially designed comb for nits.
- Applying vinegar to the hair helps the nits adhere to the comb. (1/4 cup vinegar and 3/4 cup of water)
- A thorough laundry and soaking of hair equipment needs to be done. A spray is available for furniture, mattresses pillows, car upholstery and carpets.
- Retreatment after 7 to 10 days is recommended to assure that no eggs have survived.

CAUTION: Kwell is not recommended for infants, young children and pregnant or breastfeeding women. The SRCHD Epidemiology Program may change exclusion rules at any time.

Clusters of two or more persons are considered a **reportable disease** to the Santa Rosa County Health Department (SRCHD).

For more information, please contact the SRCHD's Epidemiology Program at 850-983-5200.

