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Hot Topics - Head Lice

With the kids back at school, head lice often becomes a hot topic for many parents. Head lice are small, flat insects about three millimetres long that live on the human scalp, feeding on blood. They cannot jump, fly or swim but are spread when people have their heads close together or by sharing combs, brushes and hats.

The female lice lay eggs called nits close to the scalp and these are glued firmly to each hair. The eggs hatch in about a week and live for up to 40 days.

The most obvious sign of head lice is itchiness while nits appear as white specks in the hair close to the scalp. The best places to look for nits are behind the ears and along the hairline at the back of the neck. Actually seeing live lice is often tricky to do but combing the hair with a fine toothed comb can dislodge them.

If you discover head lice they should be treated immediately. There are a variety of treatments available from preparations that contain insecticides to products containing herbs and/or essential oils. One interesting natural treatment is Moov Head Lice Solution which contains eucalyptus and lemon tea tree essential oils. It is the result of many years of research and in clinical trials in Australia, was found to be twice as effective as the leading chemical product. Check with your pharmacist which is the most appropriate treatment for you and your family.

Ensure all the treatments are rubbed thoroughly into the scalp and then combed through from the roots to the tips of the hair. It is important to repeat any treatment seven days later to kill off any lice that have hatched since the first treatment. Use a metal fine-toothed comb to comb out dead lice and damage any surviving ones. Battery operated combs are also available which claim to stun the lice to make them easier to remove.

Rinsing the hair in a half water, half vinegar solution after treating may help dissolve the glue that sticks the eggs to the hair and make combing them out much easier. Wash hair brushes, hair ties etc in hot water or soak in disinfectant solution. Another study has found applying thick white conditioner to dry hair and combing through the hair with a metal fine toothed comb may help to remove lice. The process needs to be repeated daily for 10 days until all the lice have been removed. Tea tree oil may help prevent re-infestation of head lice. Simply place 20 drops into the conditioner bottle and use regularly.

While there is a head lice problem in your community, check the hair of everyone in the family daily and wet comb the hair every three days with a metal fine toothed comb. Brushing the hair often is a cheap and effective way of reducing the spread of lice.