



Clinic Corner: Monthly Health and Safety Tips written by Akron Children's Hospital, School Health Services, Registered Nurses. ☺

HEAD LICE Q & A

Since the start of the school year this fall we have had many questions from parents about head lice. We have had a few cases of head lice in the schools and would like to share some common questions and follow-up information:

1. *Have there been any epidemics in the schools?*

No, there have been no large class outbreaks. We can only go by what is reported, so it is very helpful for parents to call us and let us know about their child, so we can offer appropriate treatment and follow-up.

2. *My child has been scratching her head a lot. Does this mean for sure she has lice?*

Itching of the head or the perception that something is crawling on the head does not warrant treatment for lice. The only way to confirm a child has lice is to find the actual bugs, and the easiest way to confirm is to comb the hair. Need a comb for a suspected case? Not sure what a real louse and eggs (nits) looks like? Call the health clinic and we can help you. Remember, lice do not fly or jump – they crawl and are usually spread by close contact. Nits do not move, so if something whitish or black moves in the head, it is not a nit.

3. *My child's friend has lice. Should I treat my child just in case?*

Treatment for lice should be considered only when active lice bugs and viable nits (eggs) are observed. Treatment is not preventive, and can be expensive. It can take up to two or three weeks after a contact for symptoms to appear, depending on how much scratching a child may do. If your child is exposed, parents may want to comb their child's head with a lice comb for about two weeks to see if their child has become infested.

4. *My child has lice. Do I need to clean my house and car?*

Head lice and their eggs soon perish if separated from the human host. Removed lice survive a day or two and the eggs generally lose viability within a week. It is advised to vacuum the house and car, and then change the vacuum bag. Clothing and bedding should be washed, and stuffed animal toys should be bagged or put in the dryer on high for 30 minutes. Don't forget sports helmets and hats! Combs and brushes should be washed daily to dislodge any bugs or nits. Insecticidal sprays are not recommended as they unnecessarily expose children to residues.

5. *I have heard that olive oil, mayonnaise are effective treatments. Is this true?*

If your child has head lice, call the health clinic staff and we can offer appropriate treatment. This most important thing is to use a product properly and remove any bugs and nits. If children have head lice, they should be combed and checked daily until no live lice are discovered for two weeks.

We hope these questions help. Remember that though having lice is a nuisance, they do not carry disease and they do not pose a health hazard. Please call your school clinic for any other questions you have!