IDRS Infectious Disease Reporting System

Disease Reporting 24 Hours a Day

Columbus Public Health and Franklin County Public Health

LICE (PEDICULOSIS)

The louse is a wingless insect that infests humans. Another name for infestation with lice is Pediculosis. Adult lice lay eggs called nits that attach firmly to hair strands. There are three types of human lice:

- **Head lice** live in the hair of the head and feed on the scalp.
- **Body lice** live in the seams of unwashed clothing. They get on the skin just long enough to feed.
- **Pubic or crab lice** are usually found on the pubic hairs, but can also occur on the face or body.

Symptoms

- Itching of the infested area (head, behind ears, etc) beginning a few days to weeks after infestation.
- Visible lice or nits in the hair. Nits are see-through, the size of a comma (,), and cling to the hair shaft.
- Pubic lice cause slate-blue marks in the areas where they have bitten the host person.
- Body lice tend to get onto the skin in areas clothing fits snugly such as the belt line, collar and cuff.

Transmission

- Lice cannot jump, fly, or swim. They crawl from one person to another directly through close contact or though shared objects such as hats, clothes, linens, carpet, combs, barrettes, etc.
- Lice affect all ethnic and socio-economic groups. They are not a disease of poverty, nor do they spread other illnesses. Animals do not carry human lice and people cannot get lice from animals.
- As long as live lice are present and until all lice and eggs are killed and removed, they can be spread from one person to another.

Treatment

- Inspect all members of the household and treat **only** those with live lice. Pyrethrins (Clear, Rid, Pronto, etc) and Permethrin (Nix, etc.) are two types of safe, over the counter treatments for lice**. Be sure to read the instructions carefully**, as a second treatment may be recommended or required in 7-10 days for complete treatment. Other solutions are available by prescription.
- Check the affected person's head daily for nits and remove them. Nits are hard to kill and if they hatch, they could start the infestation all over again.
- Clean the environment:
  - Wash bed linens, pillows, towels, and clothing in hot water and dry in a hot dryer.
  - Put anything you cannot wash (stuffed animals, etc.) in a plastic bag for 2 weeks in the freezer.
  - Soak combs, brushes, barrettes, etc. in hot water for 15 minutes.
- Vacuum carpets and upholstered furniture is sufficient to eliminate any accidentally dislodged lice.
- Teach children not to share clothing, headwear, combs, brushes, and bedding. Children with lice can usually go back to school the day after they are treated, depending on the school's policy.
- Resistance to lice is possible and has been documented in a few foreign countries. However, when lice persist on a child it is usually either because not all of the nits were removed, or the child may have been re-exposed. If thorough treatment does not work, switch to a different type (pyrethrin or permethrin).

Additional Information

- Never use kerosene or any other flammable product on the hair. Do not use mayonnaise, olive oil, etc. as a substitute for the medication. These products don't kill nits.
- Be sure that dandruff and hair debris from dry scalp are not confused with nits.
- **DO NOT** use sprays or fogs. They are unnecessary, and spread chemicals that are harmful to people and pets.

All information is general in nature and is not intended to be used as a substitute for appropriate professional advice.

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