



Head lice

What are head lice?

Head lice are parasitic insects found on the heads of people. Having head lice is very common.

What are the symptoms of head lice?

Symptoms of head lice infestation may include a tickling feeling in the hair, itching caused by an allergic reaction to the bites, irritability, and sores on the head caused by scratching. These sores can sometimes become infected.

What do head lice look like?

Nit: Nits are head lice eggs. They are very small, about the size of a knot in thread, hard to see, and are often confused for dandruff or hair spray droplets. Nits are laid by the adult female at the base of the hair shaft and are firmly attached to the hair shaft. They are oval and usually yellow to white. Nits take about 1 week to hatch. Eggs are usually located within 1/4 inch of the scalp.

Nymph: The nit hatches into a baby louse called a nymph. It looks like an adult head louse, but is smaller. Nymphs mature into adults about 7 days after hatching.

Adult: The adult louse is about the size of a sesame seed, has six legs, and is tan to grayish-white. In persons with dark hair, the adult louse will look darker. Adult lice can live up to 30 days on a person's head. To live, adult lice need to feed on blood. If the louse falls off a person, it dies within 2 days.

How can I get more information on Head lice?

For more information on head lice or any other health issues, call the Sedgwick County Health Department at 660-7362. Or visit the Sedgwick County website at www.sedgwickcounty.org.

How is head lice spread?

Head lice is spread by contact with an already infested person. Contact is common through slumber parties, sports activities, camp and the playground. Wearing infested clothing, such as hats, scarves, coats, sports uniforms, or hair ribbons can spread head lice. Using infested combs, brushes, or towels and lying on a bed, couch, pillow, carpet, or stuffed animal that has recently been in contact with an infested person can also spread head lice.

How is head lice treated?

The most important step in treating a head lice infestation is to treat the person and other family members with medication to kill the lice. This medication may be prescription or over-the-counter. Wash clothing and bedding worn or used by the infested person in the 2-day period before treatment is started.

Head lice do not survive long if they fall off a person and cannot feed. The following simple steps can help you avoid re-infestation:

- Avoid head-to-head contact common during play at school and at home.
- Do not share clothing, such as hats, scarves, coats, sports uniforms, or hair ribbons.
- Do not share infested combs, brushes, or towels.
- Do not lie on beds, couches, pillows, carpets, or stuffed animals that have recently been in contact with an infested person.