

Dawson Community Health Centre

Dawson, YT

phone: 867-993-4300

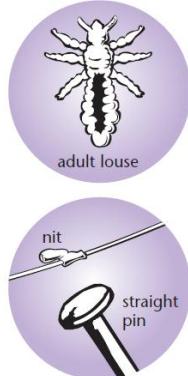
fax: 867-993-4301

Dear parent/guardian,

Your child may have been exposed to head lice recently in his/her school or day care program. Below you will find information on preventing the spread of head lice, checking your child for head lice and how to treat lice infestations.

What to look for:

- Adult lice are small (about the size of a sesame seed).
- Eggs (nits) are white or light brown and about the size of a poppy seed. They are stuck firmly to the base of the hair and will not move unless pulled with your fingernails or a nit comb (unlike dandruff).
- Lice stay near the scalp, often behind the ears, near the neckline, and back of the head.
- Head lice hold tightly to the hair. They move by crawling. They cannot hop or fly (they do not have wings), but do move quickly making it difficult to find in a child's hair.
- Signs of a head lice infestation include: itchy scalp, tickling sensation in a person's hair. Head lice are most active in the dark.



If your child is found to have head lice, check all household members. Do not treat anyone for head lice or the environment unless you see nits (eggs) or head lice.

Treatment: Option A - Prescription or over-the-counter head lice treatment:

- Permethrin (Nix) can be obtained free of charge from the Dawson Community Health Centre.
- Whether using an over-the-counter head lice product or a prescribed treatment, it is very important that you read and follow all directions on the product's label.
- Do not treat someone who does not have live lice (or nits close to the head). **Do not use these products as a prevention method to avoid lice.**
- Do not use a cream rinse, combination shampoo/conditioner, or conditioner on the hair before using the lice medicine. **Do not rewash the hair for 2 days after the lice medicine is removed.**
Avoid swimming until 2 days after each treatment.

- It is recommended that both the person getting treated and the person administering the treatment put on clean clothing after the treatment is completed.
- Be cautious not to use more than one head lice medication at time.
- 8-12 hours after treatment, examine your child's head again. If you see a few lice still around, but they are moving more slowly than before, do not re-treat. Comb the dead lice and any remaining live lice out of the hair using a fine-toothed nit/lice comb.
- To comb through the hair, sit in a well-lit area. Part the hair into small sections and comb through one section at a time. **Be patient and thorough, it can take a lot of time.**
- 8-12 hours after treatment, if no dead lice are found and lice appear to be as active as before, the medicine may not be working. Do not re-treat until speaking with your health care provider. Your health care provider may recommend using a different lice medicine.
- **Re-treatment is recommended for most lice medicines after 9-10 days.** This should kill any newly hatched lice before they produce new eggs. Be sure to follow the instructions for the product you are using.
- No shampoo is 100% effective. **It is important to check the hair and comb through it with a nit comb every 1-2 days.** This will help to remove nits and lice and can decrease the chance of self re-infestation. **Do this for 2-3 weeks to be sure all lice and nits are gone.**
- Wash combs, brushes, hats and other hair accessories of the affected person in hot water.

Treatment: Option B – Wet combing out head lice and nits:

- This option is very time consuming and the **steps must be followed carefully and completely.** Wet combing is based on the life cycle of head lice. It focuses on removing the live head lice and does not require removing nits from the head, although some people still choose to remove the nits. Combing treatments are done every 3 days over a two week period. This breaks the life cycle of head lice by removing them before they are full grown and able to reproduce.
- Wash hair with ordinary shampoo and rinse.
- Apply at least $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of conditioner to saturate the hair.
- Sit behind your child, and use a bright light. Comb sections of hair using a nit comb, metal works best. Firmly draw the comb from the scalp to the end of the hair. After each stroke, rinse the comb in a sink or bowl of hot water and wipe dry. Continue section by section until with entire head is done.
- Rinse hair – leave hair dripping wet. Repeat combing **without** conditioner until no lice are found
- Comb at least every 3 days until no live lice are discovered for two weeks. It may take several hours each night for several nights to tackle the problem. An entertaining video may help keep the child occupied during this time.
- Adult female lice cement eggs to the base of a hair shaft near the skin. As the hair grows, eggs are moved away from the scalp. Eggs more than $\frac{1}{4}$ inch from the scalp are nearly always hatched and do not mean live lice are present.
- Combs, brushes, hats and other hair accessories in contact with an infested person should be washed in hot water each day to dislodge any lice or nits.
- Combing is sometimes painful to the child or it may be impractical for other reasons. In these cases, consider using anti-louse products.

Treatment of clothes and other items:

- A clothes dryer set at high heat or a hot pressing iron will kill lice or their eggs on pillowcases, sheets, nightclothes, towels and similar items your child has been in contact with **during the previous two days**. (Lice and their eggs do not live more than one to two days off the head.)
- Lice and their eggs on objects (such as toys) may be killed by freezing temperatures. Objects that cannot be put in a clothes dryer can be placed in a freezer (or outdoors if sufficiently cold) for several days. This treatment is rarely required.

Cleaning the house and car:

- Once lice fall off of the head, they usually die within a day and eggs generally cannot live much longer. Thoroughly vacuuming the house and furniture is all that is really necessary for cleaning the home. A major cleaning effort will do little to further eliminate head lice.
- Insecticide treatments for the home, vehicles, or carpets and furniture are not needed and unnecessarily expose family members to the insecticides.

Preventing infestation:

The following are steps that can be taken to help prevent and control the spread of head lice:

- Avoid head-to-head (hair-to-hair) contact during play and other activities at home, school, and elsewhere. In an outbreak situation, **caution children with long hair to keep hair tied up**.
- Check your child's head regularly: once a week as part of your routine, after every sleepover, or every day during lice outbreaks.
- Do not share clothing such as hats, scarves, coats, sports uniforms, hair ribbons, or barrettes. Teach your child to keep these items in their backpacks when they take them off at school or daycare.
- Do not share combs, brushes, or towels. Disinfect combs and brushes used by an infested person by soaking them in hot water (at least 130°F) for 5–10 minutes.
- Do not lie on beds, couches, pillows, carpets, or stuffed animals that have recently been in contact with an infested person.

Remember, head lice are annoying and may cause itching, but they do not transmit or cause disease. Head lice can affect anyone and are not caused by poor hygiene. Children and adult's reactions to head lice can subject children to teasing, bullying and isolation, and can significantly interfere with a child's emotional well-being and ability to learn and socialize. With effort, infestations can be treated.

If you are unsure about the treatment or prevention of head lice, or if treatment is ineffective, please contact us at 993 – 4300.

Sincerely,

Maria Nyland, RN
Dawson Community Health Centre