

PEDICULOSIS: HEAD LICE ADVICE FOR SCHOOL OFFICIALS AND HEALTH-CARE PROVIDERS



Information and knowledge can make all the difference to a worried parent seeking to treat a child's head lice. Your counsel and information on how to treat head lice can improve their chances of treating lice successfully - the first time. The information you provide to the parent needs to reassure them and empower them to take charge of this harmless, but frustrating problem.

FRUSTRATION:

As the person who needs to talk to the parent and inform them that their child may have head lice consider the following:

Ask them if this is their first experience with head lice, this will tell you their familiarity with the problem.

There are many misconceptions about head lice reassure parents that:

- Head lice infestation is a common problem among school-age children.
- An infestation does not mean that their child's hair or home, has not been kept clean-in fact, lice prefer a clean human scalp.
- Lice can not survive more than about 48 hours away from a human head.
- There are safe, effective products available that will eradicate lice infestation if:
 - Used as recommended
 - Accompanied by vigilant nit removal
 - Followed by inspection and
 - Re-application 7-10 days later to kill any newly hatched nymphs.
 - Note that there are no known reports in Canada of lice being resistant to existing lice treatments.

CONFUSION:

There are a number of lice treatments on the market. The most popular contain *pyrethrins*-natural insecticides extracted from chrysanthemum flowers. There are several lice treatment products available including R&C™ 2 in 1 Shampoo + Conditioner (a single-step product), Kwellada-P® Creme Rinse and Nix™ Creme Rinse. It is important that parents understand that in most provinces, these products are only available from their local pharmacist and that the pharmacist is a good source of information.

EMPOWERMENT:

Compliance is crucial to effective lice eradication. Proper use of the products and effective lice eradication will ensure children return to school quickly, and that the family and school experience less stress. Remind parents of the following:

- To carefully read the instructions for whatever treatment they purchase
- Some are applied to dry hair, while others are applied to wet and/or washed hair.
- Use plenty of product, enough to thoroughly saturate all of the hair, especially around the ears and the nape of the neck. Not using enough now may lead to treatment failure.
- Wrap the treated hair in a plastic bag or cap for the duration of the treatment in order to contain the treatment to the scalp area and away from eyes.
- To remove nits (nit picking in its truest sense). If possible, demonstrate proper nit-picking technique.
- To apply a second application of lice treatment 7-10 days following the first treatment, for most lice treatments.
- Efficacy depends on a lethal dose of pediculicide being delivered to each viable louse and nit.

REINFORCING POST-TREATMENT:

Remember, no product alone can kill 100% of lice or nits - it may take up to 24 hours for the lice to die following treatment. That's why it is so important to thoroughly remove as many nits as possible following treatment.

NIT REMOVAL:

- Nits are difficult to see and tricky to remove, so advise parents to have their child sit under a very bright light and be prepared to take at least an hour to examine the hair and scalp and remove all nits. Explain how to use a fine-toothed nit comb, tweezers or their fingertips to pull the nits off the hair shaft.
- Lice tend to lay their eggs around the back of the neck and behind the ears, so be especially vigilant in those areas.

PREVENT RE-INFESTATION:

- Re-infestation can occur via items of clothing, combs or brushes, bedclothes, or toys that may still harbour stray lice. Wash all such items in hot water at a temperature of 130°F (40°C), and dry in a hot-clothes dryer for 30 minutes, or take other necessary steps to ensure these items are lice-free.
- Re-infestation can also occur through close contact with others who still have head lice. Stress the importance of parents notifying teachers, classmates, playmates and any others who may have been in contact with their child recently.
- Finally, even the most vigilant inspection and removal may not ensure that all nits have been removed. A second application after seven days is necessary in order to kill any newly hatched lice. It is important to follow all steps just as thoroughly the second time.

SUMMARY:

Ask if they have any questions.

Emphasize the importance of following the recommended treatment guidelines.

Your counsel will improve their chances of treating lice successfully the first time. A little reassurance and time with you will help parents feel empowered to take charge of this harmless, but frustrating problem.

To help you counsel parents on the use of lice treatments, the makers of R&C™ 2 in 1 Shampoo + Conditioner have brochures available online.

