What's Going Around? Lice

Back to school! Many parents worry about the dreaded note coming home that lice is in their child’s classroom. Head lice are usually spread from one person to another through contact. Although head lice can be unpleasant, there are effective treatment options available. It is important to find and treat lice quickly to avoid spreading them to others.

What are head lice?
The head louse is a tiny, grayish-white insect. Female head lice typically live for about one month and lay 7 to 10 eggs (called nits) per day. The eggs are attached to the base of a hair, near the scalp. The eggs hatch after about eight days.

How are head lice diagnosed?
Head lice are diagnosed by examination of the scalp and hair. Most people with head lice do not have any symptoms. Some people feel itching or skin irritation of the scalp, neck, and ears. This is caused by a reaction to lice saliva, which the lice inject into the skin during feeding.

Lice can be more difficult to see than nits since they can move and hide from view. If you are unsure whether your child has lice, make an appointment for your child to be examined before you start treatment.

Finding head lice can be upsetting to children and parents, but it is important to keep the following in mind:

- Head lice are not a sign of being dirty or sick.
- You can get rid of head lice with proper treatment.
- There are no serious or long-term health problems associated with head lice.

How is it treated and prevented?
There are several options for getting rid of head lice, including creams and liquids, combing, and oral medicine (pills). It is important to follow directions carefully to ensure that the treatment works.

Insecticides — A topical insecticide is a substance, usually a lotion or gel, that is applied to the scalp to kill lice. Available insecticides include:

- Permethrin (Nix, Rid)
  2 treatments are needed for Permethrin
- Pyrethrin (A-200, Pronto, Tisit)

Wet-Combing — A way to remove lice from the hair with careful and repeated combing. It is a good option for treating very young children (under the age of 2) or if you want to avoid using insecticides. However, wet-combing is time consuming and must be repeated multiple times over a period of a few weeks.

Clothing, bedding, and towels used within 48 hours before treatment should be washed in hot water and dried in an electric dryer on the hot setting. You can use a vacuum to clean furniture, carpet, and car seats. Items that cannot be washed or vacuumed can be sealed inside a plastic bag for two weeks.

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