

## Head Lice Information Sheet

### What are Head Lice?

- Head lice are tiny grey to brown insects about the size of a sesame seed that live in human hair and must feed on human blood to live.
- They lay tiny white oval-shaped eggs about the size of a knot in a thread, called nits that lice glue to each strand of hair close to the scalp. Although it is hard to see head lice, a person can see the nits if they look closely.
- Nits are most often found in the hair behind the ears and at the back of the head and neck. The first sign of lice is itching of the head which is caused by the bite of the head lice.

### How do You Get Head Lice?

- Head lice happen mostly with elementary school-aged children.
- Children get lice from other children through head to head contact during play or sports or nap time and most often in school settings.
- Sometimes sharing combs, hats or school lockers with a louse infested child can spread head lice.
- You can't spread nits...only live lice.
- Head lice do not spread disease.
- Any child can get head lice. It doesn't matter where they live or go to school; boy or girl, black, white or brown. It doesn't mean the child is sick or unclean. It certainly doesn't mean they have bad parents.
- Children get head lice almost as much as the common cold. Millions get it at least once a year.

### How Do You Get Rid of Head Lice?

The Texas Department of State Health Services recommends the following treatment for head lice and nits:

1. Use an over-the-counter FDA-approved shampoo treatment that you find at the drug or grocery store. Follow the directions on the packaging exactly.
2. Remove as many nits as possible with a special nit comb that comes with the head lice treatment.
3. Treat your home at the same time you treat your child. Do the following:
  - Soak combs and brushes in some of the lice shampoo for 1 hour; or, in very, very hot water for 5-10 minutes.
  - Wash sheets, blankets and other bedding in the hottest setting of water in the washing machine.
  - Dry-clean non-washable items; or, seal these items in a plastic bag for 1 week.
  - Vacuum furniture, carpets and mattresses thoroughly.
4. Treat hair for a second time after 7 days (or follow the manufacturer of the lice treatment's instructions) to make sure that you kill any lice that may have hatched from nits that might have been missed during the combing, before they lay eggs.
5. There is no need to cut hair. Lice like to crawl on short hair just as much as long hair and they need the same amount of treatment.

### How Do You Keep Lice From Coming Back?

- Teach family members to recognize nits and how lice is spread and check everyone's hair periodically.
- If you find lice, follow the recommended treatment closely. It should be reported to the school nurse, who can check close contacts.
- Remind children not to share combs, brushes, hair accessories, headphones, hats, clothing, bedding, coats and so forth. Ask the teacher as your child's school if there is a space to keep jackets, hats and other personal items separate for each child. Ask what you can do to help.

RESOURCES/LINKS: <http://www.dshs.state.tx.us/schoolhealth/lice.shtml>