

ConVal School Nurses: Head Lice *Myths and Facts*

Head lice cause unnecessarily absence from school and work, millions of dollars misspent on remedies, and unnecessary treatment and misdiagnosed infestations. The following are some myths and facts about head lice....

Myth: Kids are most likely to get head lice in school.

Fact: This is a common misconception, probably stemming from the fact that school-age children are at an increased risk for getting head lice. The fact is, kids tend to get head lice from places and activities where they are more likely to have direct head-to-head contact for example, slumber parties.

Myth: Head lice jump from person to person.

Fact: Head lice are wingless insects about 1/8 inch long. They cannot hop, jump or fly.

Myth: My pet can give me head lice.

Fact: Head lice feed only on human blood. They cannot survive off the human head as they rapidly die from starvation and water loss.

Myth: Lice are dangerous and carry disease.

Fact: Lice will cause itching and a rash, and can be annoying, but have not been shown to make children sick. They should not be considered as a medical or a public health problem. However, children who have head lice can experience intense itching and develop a rash from the bites, and the skin can become infected from scratching. More than likely, the greatest harm associated with head lice could come from the well-meaning but misguided use (and overuse) of toxic treatments to kill them.

Myth: Only dirty kids get lice.

Fact: Personal hygiene has little to do with it. Lice can survive 24 hours underwater and they are not killed by soap and water.

Myth: I should use a pesticide on every surface of my house if my child has lice.

Fact: Lice can only survive for a day or two off the human head. Nits that hatch will die if they don't find food within hours. There is no need to clean every inch of the house. Concentrate on the hair instead. The best way to handle a lice infestation is to simply vacuum any items and areas you think your child may have rested their head on, wash their linens and towels with hot water and put them in a hot dryer to kill any lice or nits.

Myth: Head lice can be treated with kerosene.

Fact: Absolutely not! This is very dangerous. Consult your child's health care provider for treatment recommendations. These treatments might include pediculocides, suffocation and others. Keep in mind that because the egg is particularly resistant to some chemical treatments, a second treatment is often required about 10 days later to target the newly hatched lice. Also, every successful lice removal program must include

daily manual nitpicking. Lice combs work well as do finger nails. Getting rid of head lice requires time and patience. It can take 4 -6 weeks to remove all viable nits.

Myth: Head lice are extremely contagious and children who are diagnosed with head lice should be isolated until all the nits are gone.

Fact: The truth is that lice are most frequently spread through head-to-head contact, which allows the lice to travel from one person to another. Since they cannot jump from one person to another, transmission can be prevented by taking such precautions as not sharing personal items and avoiding close contact. Isolation of a child who has head lice, or keeping him out of school, as long as he has begun treatment, is not necessary.

In fact, the American Academy of Pediatrics and the National Association of School Nurses have recommended that schools revise so-called "no-nit" policies, which require children to be kept out of school until they are completely free of nits and lice. ConVal did this in June of 2011.

Myth: My child's school will check for head lice.

Fact: No. Screening for nits is not an accurate way of predicting if children are or will be infested and screening for live lice has not been proven to have a significant effect on the incidence of head lice in school.

Studies demonstrate that screening for head lice in schools does not decrease the incidence of head lice and is not cost effective. Education of parents in identifying and managing head lice is more effective. The ConVal school nurses are available for information about checking your child's head.