

FACT SHEET
HEAD LICE
(Pediculosis Capitis)

<i>What are Head Lice?</i>	Head lice are tiny, wingless, grayish-tan insects that live and breed in human hair. The eggs, called nits, are easier to see than the lice themselves and are usually found attached to hair shafts close to the scalp behind the ears and on the back of the neck.
<i>How so they spread?</i>	Head lice are very contagious. They are spread through the sharing of personal items such as combs, brushes, scarves, hats, headphones, sleeping bags, and stuffed animals.
<i>What are the early signs?</i>	The first clue that a child has head lice is frequent scratching of the scalp. To check for infestation, carefully examine the hair around the back of the neck and behind the ears.
<i>How are they treated?</i>	Head lice infestation can be treated with a head lice medication, called a pediculicide. There are several pediculicides on the market, and they come in a variety of forms: shampoo, crème rinse, and lotion. Look for a treatment that kills the nits as well as the lice and offers protection from re-infestation. Nits cannot be washed away like dirt or dandruff; they must be removed with a special comb designed for this purpose. Head lice can live about 30 days on humans. It takes 7-10 days for a nit to hatch.
<i>When is ok to return to school?</i>	Children may return to school after proper treatment has been given and they are nit and louse free.
<i>Other important information</i>	Encourage children not to share personal items such as combs, brushes, scarves and hats. Remember that nits cannot be washed away like dirt or dandruff. Lice can live 48-72 hours without a human host and cannot live on family pets.

This fact sheet is not intended to replace the advice of your physician. Parents should contact their healthcare provider if they have concerns regarding their child’s health. If you have general questions, you may contact a Kalamazoo County nurse at 373-5264 or 373-5267.

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