

EXTENSION TIP OF THE WEEK – HEAD LICE

If you have school aged children, you have undoubtedly received the dreaded notification that head lice have been identified in your child's classroom.

Here are some important facts that will help you deal with the problem:

1. Lice most frequently spread by hair to hair contact. They cannot jump or fly. Household pets cannot get infested nor serve as a head lice source.
2. Lice need to be in contact with a host to survive and grow, otherwise will die within 24 hours.
3. Anyone can contract head lice, though they are most commonly seen on pre-school and school aged kids age 3-12.
4. Head lice are NOT a sign of being dirty. Most children who are or have been infested are bathed regularly and wear clean clothing.
5. Treating the hair and scalp of infested individuals is the most important and effective way to control head lice. Treatment is accomplished with an insecticidal shampoo and/or by thoroughly removing nits by combing hair with a fine-toothed comb. See your pharmacist.
6. It is rare to find live lice on bed linens- even of people who have extreme infestations with many lice. It is unlikely that lice will be living in carpet, upholstery, toys, etc.
7. Treatment for head lice will not prevent another infestation. Shampoos used for controlling lice contain an insecticide that will kill nymphs and adults, but the effect is short-lived and will not act as a repellent against future infestations. Lice infestation can reoccur if a person has hair-to-hair contact with another infested person.
8. The term "Super lice" refers to lice that appear to be developing resistance to over-the-counter lice killing shampoos. In this way, lice are like bacteria that are increasingly resistant to antibiotics. Human head lice do not transmit any diseases. They are tedious to treat, and distressing for parents and children, but they do not pose any risk in terms of transferring bacteria or viruses to the host.

Terms:

Egg- louse eggs are cemented to the hair shaft by an adult female louse- they are very small in size- about the size of a knot tied on a string

Nymph- a tiny immature stage of the louse that looks like a small adult

Adult- size of a sesame seed

Iowa State University Extension, Sioux County – Tip of the Week

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