PRESS RELEASE FOR LOCAL MEDIA
Central Michigan District Health Department
“Promoting Healthy Families, Healthy Communities”
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To: Local Newspaper
From: Central Michigan District Health Department
RE: Head Lice
Release Date: August 2008

Head Lice Awareness

According to the Center for Disease Control (CDC), “head louse is a parasitic insect that can be found on the head, eyebrows, and eyelashes of people. Head lice feed on human blood several times a day and live close to the human scalp. Head lice are not known to spread disease.” Head Lice infestations affect millions of people (mostly children) each year. The CDC estimates “6 million to 12 million infestations occur each year in the United States among children 3 to 11 years of age.” These infections can happen to any child in any home or school, in spite of social status or location. The following recommendations by the CDC explain warning signs of infestation. There are also recommendations of what you can do to rid you or your child of lice.

What are the signs and symptoms of head lice infestation?

- Tickling feeling of something moving in the hair.
- Itching, caused by an allergic reaction to the bites of the head louse.
- Irritability and difficulty sleeping; head lice are most active in the dark.
- Sores on the head caused by scratching. These sores can sometimes become infected with bacteria found on the person's skin.

How did my child get head lice?

Head-to-head contact with an already infested person is the most common way to get head lice. Head-to-head contact is common during play at school, at home, and elsewhere (sports activities, playground, slumber parties, camp).

Uncommonly, head lice may be spread by sharing clothing or belongings onto which lice or nits may have crawled or fallen. Examples include:

- Sharing clothing (hats, scarves, coats, sports uniforms) or articles (hair ribbons, barrettes, combs, brushes, towels, stuffed animals) recently worn or used by an infested person.
- Lying on a bed, couch, pillow, or carpet that has recently been in contact with an infested person. The risk of getting an infestation by a louse or nit that has fallen onto a carpet or furniture is very small.

Dogs, cats, and other pets do not play a role in the spread of human lice.

How are head lice infestations diagnosed?

The diagnosis of a head lice infestation is best made by finding a live nymph or adult louse on the scalp or hair of a person. Because nymphs and adult lice are very small, move quickly, and avoid light, they can be difficult to find. Use of a magnifying lens and a fine-toothed comb may be helpful to find live lice. If crawling lice are not seen, finding nits firmly attached within a 1/4 inch of base of the hair shafts strongly suggests, but does not confirm, that a person is infested and should
be treated. Nits that are attached more than 1/4 inch from the base of the hair shaft are almost always dead or already hatched. Nits are often confused with other things found in the hair such as dandruff, hair spray droplets, and dirt particles. If no live nymphs or adult lice are seen, and the only nits found are more than ¼-inch from the scalp, the infestation is probably old and no longer active and does not need to be treated.

If you are not sure if a person has head lice, the diagnosis should be made by their health care provider, local health department, or other person trained to identify live head lice.

Treatment

Once head lice have been discovered, you should seek treatment immediately. Lice will not go away without treatment. Usually a cream, lotion, or shampoo is used to kill the lice and a fine-toothed comb can be effective at removing the louse and nits. A second treatment may be needed if the first fails to kill all of the lice and nits. This may be done 7-10 days after the first treatment. The itching may continue for 7-10 days after successfully killing all lice and nits. Dead nits will stay in a person’s hair until removed with a fine-toothed comb. Other members of the infected person’s home should also be inspected and treated if necessary. Also, anyone who has shared a bed with an infected person should be treated.

A doctor should be consulted if treatments fail to kill all lice and their nits, if the person treated develops side effects from the product, or if a skin infection develops. Symptoms of a skin infection include pain, swelling, heat, redness, and/or red streaks stemming from infected area, pussy discharge, and fever of 100°F.

After treating each infested person, the household will also need treatment. These treatments may need to be performed for several days. Personal items such as hats, bedding, plush toys, clothing, etc. should be washed for a minimum of ten minutes at a temperature of 130-140°F and then dried on high heat for about thirty minutes. Some items are not able to be laundered. In these cases it is best to seal items in a plastic bag for two weeks at room temperature or twenty-four hours at below-freezing temperatures.

It is also important to vacuum carpets, floors, furniture, etc. to remove any lice or nits that may be present. It will not be necessary to change vacuum bags because lice cannot survive for long without a host to feed on.

This article was provided to you by the staff at the Central Michigan District Health Department which serves Arenac, Clare, Gladwin, Isabella, Osceola and Roscommon Counties.

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