

BERKELEY PEDIATRICS HEAD LICE TREATMENT HANDOUT:  
Identification and Eradication

- General information about lice:
  - There is no correlation between hygiene or family income and lice infestations.
  - We encourage parents to tell children that they haven't done anything wrong and that having lice doesn't make them dirty.
  - Head lice are parasitic insects that require human blood for survival.
  - Head lice cannot fly or jump. They spread mainly through head-to-head contact, but can also be passed by sharing clothing, bed linens, combs, brushes, hair ribbons, sports uniforms, car seats and hats.
  - Animals can't catch head lice and pass them on to people or the other way around.
  - Head lice infestations occur worldwide.
  - Head lice develop in three forms: nits, nymphs, and adults.
  - Head lice infestation is diagnosed by looking closely through the hair and scalp for nits, nymphs, or adult lice.
- Nits
  - Nits are head lice eggs.
  - They are smaller than nymphs or adults and are often mistaken for dandruff or droplets of hairspray.
  - Nits are found "glued" to the hair shaft. Unlike dandruff or hairspray, they will **not** slide along a strand of hair.
  - They are oval and usually yellow to white.
  - Nits take about 1 week to hatch.
- Nymphs
  - Nits hatch into nymphs. Nymphs are immature adult head lice.
  - Nymphs mature into adults about 7 days after hatching.
  - To live, nymphs must feed on blood.
- Adults
  - Adults can be **hard** to find; there are usually few of them, and they can move quickly from searching fingers.
  - They are the size of a sesame seed, have six legs and are tan to gray-white. In persons with dark hair they will appear darker.
  - Adult lice can live up to 30 days on a person's head. If a louse falls off a person, it dies within 3 days.
- How can you treat your kids and family members?
  - General information on eradication no matter which treatment you choose:
    - Over the last several years, [lice have become increasingly resistant](#) to medicine. Thus, mechanical nit removal is the cornerstone of lice treatment, although the medicines can still be very helpful.
    - A key to success is making sure that ALL individuals who may be potentially affected by the outbreak are free of lice and nits. If 99.99% of the lice are killed, but .01% are not, you already have the makings of another outbreak.
    - Steps to follow:
      - Remove all clothing.
      - Treat with one of the below treatment options.
      - Remove nits and lice from the hair shaft using a nit comb (often found in lice-killing medicine packages). Flea combs used for cats and dogs can also be used.
      - If some live lice are still found but are moving more slowly than before treatment, do not re-treat. Comb dead and remaining live lice out.
      - Have the affected person put on clean clothing after treatment.
      - After treatment, if no dead lice are found and lice seem as active as before, the medicine may not be working.

- Shampoo daily (starting 2 days after treatment) and follow with daily careful nit-combing. Tea tree oil shampoo (not straight tea tree oil) is thought to be especially helpful to prevent reinfestation.
  - On day 6 repeat an application of the same treatment in order to catch any lice that might have hatched.
  - Continue monitoring and nit combing every 2-3 days for 3 weeks.
- Treatment options:
1. Pediculicide (an agent that is known to kill lice): Nix
    - Medicated lice treatments can usually kill the lice and nits. It may take a few days for the itching to stop.
    - Repeat treatment in 6-7 days to make sure all the nits have been killed and to avoid risk of reinfestation.
    - We recommend that Nix be left on for **4 hours**. Yes, this is longer than recommended by the manufacturer.
  2. Cetaphil Gentle Skin Cleanser (smothering technique) \*Unproven technique
    - Can be used on sensitive skin. However, it can sting if it gets into the eyes.
    - Comb out as many nits as possible before you start.
    - Use 8-12 ounces of Cetaphil cleanser transferred into a bottle with a pointed tip like a catsup dispenser.
    - Apply ¼ of the cleanser directly to the DRY scalp in a back-and-forth fashion.
    - Apply another 1/4 of the lotion in the perpendicular direction to create a criss-cross pattern.
    - Rub the lotion into the scalp.
    - Apply another layer of lotion in a criss-cross pattern and massage the lotion in again being sure that every strand of hair is covered.
    - Comb out any excess lotion and blow-dry the hair until all the lotion is dried. This will take longer than drying hair wet with water.
    - Leave the lotion on for at least 8 hours and wash out with normal shampoo. Comb again looking for nits.
    - Repeat in 5-6 days and again in 10-12 days.
  3. Vaseline or Mayonnaise (another smothering method) \*Unproven technique. **DO NOT USE VASELINE WITH A HAIR DRYER OR NEAR AN OPEN FLAME.** It is a petroleum product and is very flammable.
    - Cover the infested head liberally in Vaseline.
    - Place a shower cap over the entire head for the night (or an eight-hour period).
    - Then shampoo the Vaseline out of the hair. It may take a week to get it all the Vaseline out. Washing the hair with dishwashing liquid may help.
  4. The oils treatment: \*Unproven technique. Do not use on children with asthma.
    - Regular shampoo (use an inexpensive brand such as Prell – seems to mix more easily with the oils) and three ingredients: 3 tbsp olive oil, 1 tsp tea tree oil, 1 tsp rosemary or eucalyptus oil.
    - Add the oils to a small amount of shampoo and mix well.
    - Work into hair and leave on for half an hour with a tight-fitting shower cap.
    - This mixture has a strong smell. The fumes may burn the eyes, so don't lean forward.
    - Wash hair two or three times to get the oil out. Repeat the procedure if necessary.
    - As with above techniques use a nit comb on your child's hair after regular shampooing every 3 to 4 days for 2 weeks. Wetting the hair beforehand is recommended because it temporarily immobilizes the lice and they become easier to comb out.
- Cautions:
    - Women who are pregnant or breastfeeding should not use head-lice medications.
    - Do not use lice-killing medicines on the eyebrows or eyelashes.

- Don't use a hair dryer on your child's hair after applying any of the currently available scalp treatments (except with the cetaphil method), because some contain flammable ingredients.
  - Don't use a cream rinse or shampoo/conditioner combination before applying lice medication.
  - Don't wash your child's hair for 1 to 2 days after using a medicated treatment.
  - Don't use sprays or hire a pest control company to try to get rid of the lice, as they can be harmful.
  - Don't use the same medication more than three times on one person.
- If treatment is not working: Lice infestation can be a persistent nuisance, especially in group settings. If you feel like you're following every recommendation and your child still has lice, it may be because of one or more of the following:
  - there are still some nits left behind
  - your child is still being exposed to someone with lice
  - the treatment you're using isn't effective
- How should you treat the household?
  - Every surface in your home and car(s) that has touched a head, or has touched an object that has touched a head, must be deloused.
  - Even clean clothes that have been hanging in a closet next to contaminated clothing might need to be washed.
  - To kill lice and nits, machine-wash all washable clothing and bed linens that the infested person touched during the 2 days before they were diagnosed. Wash clothes and linens in the HOT water cycle (130 F). Dry items on the hot cycle for at least 20 minutes.
  - Seal all non-washable items in a plastic bag for 2 weeks.
  - Soak combs and brushes for 1 hour in rubbing alcohol or Lysol, or put in the freezer for 2 days.
  - Vacuum the floor and furniture. Do not use lice sprays; they can be toxic if inhaled.
- How can you prevent future infestations?
  - Watch for signs of lice, such as frequent head scratching.
  - Teach children not to share combs, brushes, scarves, hair ribbons, helmets, headphones, hats, towels, bedding, clothing, or other personal items.
  - Examine household members and close contacts of a person with head lice, and treat if infested. Tell your child to try to avoid head-to-head contact at school (in gym, on the playground, or during sports) and while playing at home with other children.