

HEAD LICE 101

Prepared by Glen Ogilvie Parents Against Lice (PAL)
& endorsed by the Glen Ogilvie School Council



Head lice are a year-round problem in our community. Lice are spread in schools, daycares, recreation facilities, camps and homes. This isn't new, but parents can no longer expect that a school nurse is available to regularly check students for this persistent problem. "The major responsibility for identifying and treating head lice in our families is up to parents/guardians". (Eastern Ont. Health Unit, Nov. 2012)

ANYONE can get head lice. Head lice spread easily, especially where people are in close contact. They are most common among school-aged children or children attending daycare. They spread through both direct hair-to-hair contact and indirect contact (sharing hats, hair accessories, headphones, pillows, blankets, etc.) They don't fly or hop, but can crawl very quickly. (Caring for kids – Canadian Paediatric Society).

Having lice is not a sign of poor hygiene, it's just bad luck!

What does the school do? The school alerts all families in a class that has a student with lice **but** this only happens if the affected family lets the school know their child has lice.

Who is PAL? We are a group of parents at Glen O who are very familiar with fighting head lice affecting our friends and families. We know lice are a VERY time consuming, stressful and expensive problem.

We hope to prevent or minimize the spread of lice in the school by providing Glen O families with information and support.

WHAT CAN ALL PARENTS/GUARDIANS DO?

1. Know what you are looking for!

Lice are hard to spot, and nits often look like sand or dry skin – but the key difference is that sand and dry skin can be easily removed while nits will stay put on the hair shaft.

Check out this **You Tube video: "What do lice and nits look like in the hair?"**

(www.youtube.com/watch?v=mAsfE8AWxzU) & The Ottawa Public Health "Lice Fact Sheet" sent home by the school (also available online).

2. Check your child's head **WEEKLY** for signs of lice as part of your normal routine and **more often during an outbreak**". (Eastern Ontario Health Unit, Nov. 2012) As well, if you see them scratch, have a peek!

There are two standard lice checking methods:

- **Visual checks:**
 - Good lighting (bright sun when possible) and a magnification glass are very helpful as you check the entire head thoroughly. See a demo at **You Tube video "How to Perform a Head Check for Head Lice"** (www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hybe7quFRVU)
- **Comb/conditioner method (using a HIGH QUALITY METAL LICE COMB):**
 - For this simple & effective method, you apply conditioner to your child's dry hair, and then comb it out in sections, wiping the accumulated conditioner onto a paper towel to look for signs of nits or lice. More detailed instructions can be found online at <http://www.health.gov.sk.ca/head-lice> under "How do I check for lice?"



What kind of comb? PAL recommends "The Louse Trap Comb" (available at the Lice Squad, Melonheads at Place d'Orleans, Boomerang Kids and over the internet). Your pharmacist can give you suggestions on other quality metal combs. These combs can be boiled between each use and their tight tines can catch almost everything when used properly. Many parents have found that the plastic combs that come in the lice treatment kits just don't work.

3. If your child has head lice, **STAY CALM** and treat it as effectively and efficiently as possible:

There is a lot of information out there, so these tips are meant to highlight a few key points we have found helpful:

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TREATMENT:

- When you have a CONFIRMED case of head lice, use the pharmaceutical treatment **EXACTLY** as recommended on the box. Everyone in the family must be checked and all affected members must be treated. Luckily, pets cannot get or spread lice.
- The **TWO treatments** (applied **7-10 days apart**) are a must as no product kills the nits (eggs). The second treatment should kill any baby lice newly hatched since the first treatment, **BEFORE** they are mature enough to lay eggs themselves. Between treatments we recommend that long hair be kept tied back in ponytails, braids or buns to minimize the potential for accidental spread.
- **COMBING: Lice & eggs must be removed with a comb. Shampoo and treatment won't remove them.** Following each of the two treatments (and every few days afterwards for several weeks) the child's hair should be combed for nits because the drug store treatment won't work alone. You may think that by doing two treatments and thoroughly washing your child's hair, you're in the clear. Unfortunately, chances are high that you won't be fully rid of the lice if you don't take the time to do full comb outs with the metal comb. A **high quality nit picking comb** makes this job simpler and more efficient than using your fingernails or tweezers.

See **YouTube video entitled "Head Lice Removal Combing Techniques – Lice Control"** (www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=zY4Nvab6uLM). This is a great way to do your routine lice checks as well.

CLEANING YOUR HOUSE/CAR: Lice usually don't survive off a head for more than 24-48 hours, so you'll want to spend most of your time & energy where it counts most - **getting rid of nits/lice in the hair**. However, The Lice Squad recommends that you also:

- Place DRYER SAFE items which may have come in contact with lice/nits (i.e. clothes, hats, coats, pillows, stuffies, comforters, bedding etc.) in the dryer on HIGH HEAT for 30 minutes
- Vacuum items that can't be put in dryer
- If an item can't be dried or vacuumed, set it aside (in a spare room for example) for 48 hours. (Or if you don't have the space for a "quarantine area", you can bag the items)

Also...

- Couches/chairs/car upholstery can be covered with sheets. Toss sheets in the dryer on high for 30 minutes after use
- Brushes/combs/hair accessories can be cleaned by pouring boiling water over them and allowing them to soak for at least 2-3 minutes. The metal lice comb should be boiled for 2-3 minutes between uses.

Pesticide sprays are not needed & may be harmful to people and the environment (Nat. Pediculosis Assoc'n).

ADVISE EVERYONE WHO NEEDS TO BE TOLD: If your child has lice, please tell the school so that they can advise the families of all classmates to be on the lookout. Don't feel embarrassed - you didn't cause your child to have lice – but you can help stop the spread! The school will never release your child's name or your family name! Please also tell friends or anyone that your child may have been in close contact with (i.e. daycare, extra-curricular activities, friends etc.).

4. THINK ABOUT PREVENTION...Please talk to your kids about these "Lice Squad" tips too:

- For girls: Braid hair or tie it in a ponytail or wear long hair in a bun. A little hairspray to secure any flyaway hair for boys & girls is helpful.
- Spritz the hair with a solution of water and tea tree oil just before your child heads out the door. *(Please note that researchers have NOT reached an agreement as to whether using tea tree oil is effective in deterring or treating lice).*
- Avoid head-to-head contact.
- Don't share hair brushes, hair accessories, hats, helmets or head coverings.

When in school or daycare, kids should store their hats/scarves/mitts in their coat sleeves or backpacks (instead of putting them on the shared shelves where lice could crawl from one hat to another). They should try to keep their own backpacks & jackets well separated from those of their classmates.

5. Ask for help! Help is out there – contact a pharmacist or physician, the school, a professional lice removal service (we are aware of Lice Squad & Lice Crusaders in the area), or contact the PAL team at GlenOgilviePAL@gmail.com. We are here to help and can offer tips and advice...we've been there too!