



Sedgwick County...
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Health Department

FACTS & details

about Sedgwick County Government

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Head Lice

What are head lice?

Head lice are parasitic insects found on the heads of people. Head lice are not known to spread disease.

What are the symptoms of head lice?

Symptoms of head lice infestation may include a tickling feeling in the hair, itching caused by an allergic reaction to the bites, irritability and sores on the head caused by scratching. These sores can sometimes become infected.

What do head lice look like?

Nit: Nits are lice eggs. They are very small, about the size of a knot in thread, hard to see, and are often confused for dandruff or hair spray droplets. Nits are laid by the adult female at the base of the hair shaft and are firmly attached to the hair shaft. They are oval and usually yellow to white. Nits take about eight to nine days to hatch. Eggs are usually located within ¼ inch of the scalp.

Nymph: The nit hatches into a baby louse called a nymph. It looks like an adult head louse, but is smaller. Nymphs mature into adults about nine to 12 days after hatching.

Adult: The adult louse is about the size of a sesame seed, has six legs, and is tan to grayish-white. In persons with dark hair, the adult louse will look darker. Adult lice can live up to 30 days on a person's head. To live, adult lice need to feed on blood. If the louse falls off a person, it dies within two days.

How is head lice spread?

Head lice are spread by contact with an already infested person. Contact is common through slumber parties, sports activities, camp and the playground. Wearing infested clothing, such as hats, scarves, coats, sports uniforms or hair ribbons can spread head lice. Using infested combs, brushes or towels, and lying on a bed, couch, pillow, carpet, or stuffed animal that has recently been in contact with an infested person can also spread head lice. Personal hygiene, cleanliness in the home or school has nothing to do with getting head lice.

How is head lice treated?

The most important step in treating a head lice infestation is to treat the person and other family members with medication to kill the lice. This medication may be prescription or over-the-counter. Wash clothing and bedding worn or used by the infested person in the two-day period before treatment is started.

Head lice do not survive long if they fall off a person and cannot feed. The following simple steps can help you avoid re-infestation:

- Avoid head-to-head contact common during play at school and at home.
- Do not share clothing, such as hats, scarves, coats, sports uniforms or hair ribbons.
- Do not share infested combs, brushes or towels
- Do not lie on beds, couches, pillows, carpets or stuffed animals that have recently been in contact with an infested person.

For More Information:

Contact the Sedgwick County
Health Department Epidemiology Office at
316-660-7392 or visit the Sedgwick County
website at
www.sedgwickcounty.org.