



Unit 4 Lesson 5: An Ounce of Prevention

Hey! A Louse Bit Me!

Handout 1

KidsHealth®

What a Louse Is

A louse is a brown and gray parasite (say: par-uh-site), which means it feeds off of other living things. Lice (the word for more than one louse) are no bigger than the head of a pin, but they are found all over the world. Lice need to suck a tiny bit of blood to survive, and they sometimes live on people's heads and lay eggs in the hair, on the back of the neck, or behind the ears. They can also live in the fur or feathers of some animals. It's very easy for a person with lice to give it to another person: friends who share combs, brushes, hats, and headphones can also share lice very easily.

What a Louse Bite Looks and Feels Like

If a person gets lice, it doesn't feel like anything at first. A louse lays tiny, oval eggs called nits. They are yellow, tan, or brown before the lice hatch. After the lice hatch, nits appear clear or white. The lice mature within 1 to 2 weeks and begin feeding and attaching their tiny claws to the hair shaft. Louse bites look like tiny red spots on the skin, and they are very itchy.

What You Should Do

If your head is very itchy, tell an adult immediately. Getting lice has nothing to do with being dirty, and it's very common among kids who are in school together. It is something that will need to be cleared up as soon as possible.

What a Doctor Will Do

Doctors treat people who have lice by giving them a prescription for a medicated shampoo, cream, or lotion that kills lice, or instructing that they buy one off of the store shelf. An adult will need to use a fine-tooth comb to get rid of the existing nits and follow the instructions for putting the medication in your hair to kill the lice. Be sure not to use a hairdryer to dry your hair after using the medication, as some medicines contain flammable ingredients (which mean they can catch on fire and burn easily). It may take a few days for the itching to stop and the treatment may need to be repeated in 7 to 10 days to make sure any remaining lice eggs are killed.

All the carpets and furniture in the house should be vacuumed, and bedding, clothing, and stuffed animals should be washed in hot water or placed in airtight bags for at least 10 days to kill the lice and eggs. Brushes, combs, and hair accessories should be soaked in hot water, washed with medicated shampoo, or thrown away.

How to Avoid Getting Bitten

It can be hard to avoid lice completely, especially if you are like most kids and go to school every day. (After all, between 6 and 12 million people get lice every year!) But there are things you can do to protect yourself.

If you know someone has lice, avoid touching them - especially their hair. Always bring your own pillows, sleeping bags, or sheets to a sleepover. Finally, do not share brushes, combs, hats, headphones, or hair accessories - like barrettes and headbands, with anyone else.

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