



North Central District Health Department

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NCDHD Encourages Parents to Check Hair for Lice

As summer camp comes to an end and the first day of school draws near, the North Central District Health Department (NCDHD) encourages parents to conduct frequent hair checks on their children, in an effort to prevent head lice. The beginning of the school year is peak season for head lice.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), infestation with head lice is most common among pre-school children attending child care, elementary school children, and the household members of infested children. An estimated 6 million to 12 million infestations occur each year in the United States among children 3 to 11 years of age.

“Head lice are not something that you should be ashamed of,” said Patrice Sulik, NCDHD Director of Health. “It is a common problem and should be dealt with as soon as possible.”

Head lice are tiny, wingless, parasitic insects that live and feed on blood from your scalp. Head lice infest the head and neck and attach their eggs to the base of the hair shaft. Lice move by crawling; they cannot hop or fly. Lice can live for about two days without a meal and 30 days if it has a human blood supply. A female louse lays 3-5 eggs per day. It takes 7-10 days for the egg to hatch

into a nymph and another 7-10 days to fully mature and able to continue the life cycle and lay its own eggs.

Head lice is spread most commonly by close person-to-person contact and by sharing personal items with a contaminated individual, such as hats, brushes/combs, or headphones. Dogs, cats, and other pets do not play a role in the transmission of human lice.

Head lice can be seen moving on the head. Intense itching on your scalp, neck and shoulders can occur causing discomfort. Head lice are a nuisance. Because they do not cause an infectious disease, they are not considered a public health threat.

If a family member is diagnosed with lice:

- Wash items (bedding, stuffed animals, and clothing) in hot soapy water – 130 degrees Fahrenheit – and dry them at high heat for at least 30 minutes. Clothing and items that are not washable can be dry cleaned.
- Seal bedding, clothing and unwashable items in plastic bags and store for 2 weeks. This will kill live lice, and newly hatched lice will die because they have no nutrition.
- Soak brushes and combs in hot water (at least 130 degrees Fahrenheit) for five to ten minutes.
- Vacuum all floors and furniture daily, particularly where the infested person sat or lay.

NCDHD board member, Mary Ann Turner of Enfield, said, “Careful inspections of your child’s hair is the best prevention measure you can take to prevent the spread or re-infestation at your home or in school.”

Head checks need to be done at home several times a week, if not daily. Over the counter and prescription medications are available for treatment of head lice infestations. They can be very effective in ridding the hair of lice. Directions must be followed exactly, especially for the timing of any retreatments. Some lice may be resistant to the treatments. Contact your health care provider if the methods you are using are unsuccessful to eliminate lice and nits.

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About NCDHD

The North Central District Health Department (NCDHD) serves the communities of Enfield, East Windsor, Ellington, Stafford, Suffield, Vernon, Windham, and Windsor Locks. NCDHD is a full-time public health department with a full-time staff funded by its member towns and an annual per capita grant from the Connecticut State Department of Public Health. NCDHD provides professional public health services in the areas of health education and disease prevention, environmental health and emergency preparedness. The mission of NCDHD is to prevent disease, injury, and disability by promoting and protecting the health and well-being of the public and our environment.

For more information about NCDHD visit www.ncdhd.org.