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Health and wellness tips for your work, home and life—brought to you by the insurance and health care specialists at Bouchard Insurance.

Children's Health: Head Lice

Lice are small insects that live on humans and survive by feeding on blood. Humans can host three different kinds of lice: head, body and pubic.

Who is at Risk?

Head lice infestation, called pediculosis, is common in preschool and elementary school children. Adults may be infected as well, especially if they come in close contact with or live with an infected child. Girls get head lice more often than boys, and women more than men. People from all income and social levels can get lice, and contrary to popular belief, head lice isn't caused by poor personal hygiene habits or having long hair.

How do Lice Spread?

Lice are spread easily from one person to another through close body contact, shared clothing or personal items. Lice cannot jump or fly. Below are some common ways lice spread:

- Contact with an already infested person
- Sharing infested clothing, such as hats, scarves, coats, sports uniforms or hair ribbons

- Using infested combs, brushes or towels
- Lying on a bed, couch, pillow, carpet or stuffed animal that has recently been in contact with an infested person

Symptoms of Lice

Early infection with head lice often does not cause any symptoms. The most common symptom is itching, especially on the scalp, which may develop weeks or even months after the lice infest the person. In addition to itching, lice may cause the following:

- A tickling sensation on the scalp or in the hair
- Lice and their eggs, called nits, can be seen on hair on the nape of the neck and behind the ears. The nits are tiny white round or oval shapes attached to the hair near the scalp.
- Itching caused by an allergic reaction to the bites
- Sores on the head caused by scratching – scratching

infested areas can make the skin raw.

- The lymph nodes behind the ears and in the neck may become tender and swollen.

How Can I Prevent Head Lice?

Head lice are not preventable. However, frequent examination of a child's scalp may help discover and treat lice before they spread. Avoiding prolonged close contact with a person who has lice can also reduce the risk of infestation.



Did you know...?

Lice will not go away without treatment. Live lice will continue to lay eggs in the affected areas and the condition will worsen. If initial treatment does not kill all the nits, a follow-up treatment may be required seven to ten days later. However, itching may last longer, even after treatment.