

Treatment and prevention of a lousy situation

By SUZANNE KENNEDY

"My head itches."

These three words are guaranteed to strike fear into the hearts of parents everywhere. Lice. Just the mention of the word makes you itch. You're probably scratching your head right now.

Lice don't spread disease, but having to deal with them is an incredibly time-consuming and emotional experience.

There are many rumors and myths out there ... so let's set the record straight.

Lice are tiny, wingless parasites that crawl very quickly. They can't fly, hop or jump from person to person. They survive by feeding on the blood of a human host. Once off their host, they will only survive for a day or two. With more than 12 million reported cases of lice in the US each year it's estimated that 1 in 4 children will deal with them some time in their life.

Surprisingly, lice like clean hair more than dirty hair, and don't care if it's dyed or bleached. You can often see the distinctive teardrop shaped lice eggs (nits) along one side of a hair shaft. They look like grains of sand and can often be mistaken for dandruff; however, nits stick to the hair shaft and can't be blown off, like dandruff.

According to Lice Knowing You, Inc., 90 percent of any infestation is on your head and 10 percent is in your environment. The head should be your focus, but you should do some things to guard your home against re-infestation.

Wash all the bedding of the



infected person, including blankets and mattress pads, in hot water. If the infestation is severe, vacuum and quickly iron the mattress. Place stuffed animals in the dryer on high heat for 30 to 40 minutes, or a bag them and stick them in the freezer for 8 to 12 hours. Hair accessories such as combs, brushes, hairbands, headbands, helmets, etc. should be bagged and put in the freezer for 8-12 hours. Vacuum and wipe off all furniture where the infested person sat, including car seats, couches and carpet. The good news — you only need to do each of these things once.

Meanwhile, back on the head. You must manually remove every louse and nit off the head. Leaving even one can lead to another infestation. The bad news — there is no product out there that kills the nits. Manual removal is the only sure way to get rid of a head lice infestation. Nits are protected in their little sacs, which are surround-

ed by a super-sticky substance that makes the egg stick to the hair. Pesticides like Rid and home remedies like olive oil saturation still require manual removal.

Gather your weapons: paper towels, a metal lice comb, a spray bottle filled with water, 3 or 4 claw hair clips, latex gloves (or similar), a flashlight,

Lice Prevention

- Do not share hair accessories: rubber bands, headbands, brushes and combs.
- Long hair should be kept in braids or ponytails.
- Do not share hats, coats, hoodies, sweatshirts, scarves, etc.
- Children should not hang coats next to each other, but rather put them in a backpack if cubbies are not available. Never put coats in piles!
- Head-to-head contact is the most common way head lice are passed. While lice prevention products are not completely foolproof, they can be effective in keeping lice away. These rely on essential oils, which have been proven effective in repelling head lice.
- The number one method of prevention is to do once-a-week head lice checks.

and a regular comb. Thoroughly wet the hair and comb out all the tangles. Divide and clip the hair into 4 to 6 sections. Start at the front of the head and work your way back. In each section, comb the hair in all different directions with the lice comb, wiping it on paper towel each time. Then go through that section bit by bit, keeping the



Family Health

checked hair separate from the unchecked hair. Use the flashlight on the front and back of each small, thin section. Because the nits are sticky, they shine under a flashlight beam. They are only about the size of the point on a dull pencil. Pick out any lice or nits by pinching them with your fingernail and pulling them all the way off. They will

look like tiny black dots on the tissue. Move through the rest of the sections.

Discard the paper towels or tissues carefully. Do this once a day or once every other day until you find no nits or lice. Once you find no nits or lice for a week or two, you are probably okay.

If you are willing to travel to a major city, you can visit a clinic or salon created for the sole purpose of helping your family get rid of lice. Lice Knowing You, Inc. is such a place in Portland. Their staff is knowledgeable and friendly and able to talk even the most desperate mothers down off the

ledge. Their products are proven effective and pesticide free. Visit liceknowingyou.com for more information.

Suzanne Kennedy is a former middle school teacher who lives in Pendleton with her husband and four children.