

# HEAD LICE INFORMATION

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## NO NEED TO WORRY, JUST EDUCATING YOU!

Just like schools and daycare centers, Friendly Pines Camp is always on the lookout for head lice. We don't want to create more anxiety than is reasonable, but we wanted to pass on some information to parents so that they can be a bit more proactive about checking for head lice before sending children to camp. On average we only get a case or two of head lice per session, which isn't much when you consider we have about 300 people at camp; nevertheless, the discovery of head lice not only creates a lot of work for our already busy medical staff, but it also creates anxiety among campers and staff.

Here is what we do at camp now to prevent the spread of head lice. When campers arrive, our nurses do a health check on each camper within the first 24 hours of their arrival. This health check includes checking for head lice. If a camper arrives with head lice, our nurses will proceed as follows:

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- Nurses will contact the infected camper's parent(s) to notify them of the discovered head lice.
- If the head lice infestation is fairly robust or the camper's hair is such that it will require an inordinate amount of time to remove the lice, we may ask that the child return home and come back to camp once the head lice has been eradicated. This can take 24 to 36 hours. Sometimes for very bad cases, a doctor-prescribed treatment may be necessary.
- If we treat the camper on-site, the parents will be charged \$100. We use over-the-counter products.
- We will recheck the infected camper after a day or so and keep parents informed of process.
- Depending on situation, we often find it prudent to notify parents of other campers in the cabin. We may also wash all the cabin's campers' pillows and bedding, particularly those who sleep in close proximity to the infected camper.
- Nurses will do a check of the infected camper and cabin mates after a few days of discovering head lice in the cabin. This often reassures campers and counselors that all is okay.

We really urge you to check your camper a week or so before camp and then just before the first day of camp. It is easy to do, and you can find lots of resources online that will tell you how to search for head lice if you've never had the pleasure.

We have attached some information from articles provided by the CDC that you might find helpful. Please let us know if you have any questions.

### WHAT ARE THE SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF HEAD LICE INFESTATION?

- Tickling feeling of something moving in the hair
- Itching, caused by an allergic reaction to the bites of the head louse
- Irritability and difficulty sleeping; head lice are most active in the dark
- Sores on the head caused by scratching. These sores can sometimes become infected with bacteria found on the person's skin

### WHERE ARE HEAD LICE MOST COMMONLY FOUND?

Head lice and head lice nits are found almost exclusively on the scalp, particularly around and behind the ears and near the neckline at the back of the head. Head lice or head lice nits sometimes are found on the eyelashes or eyebrows but this is uncommon. Head lice hold tightly to hair with hook-like claws at the end of each of their six legs. Head lice nits are cemented firmly to the hair shaft and can be difficult to remove even after the nymphs hatch and empty casings remain.

## WHO IS AT RISK FOR GETTING HEAD LICE?

Head lice are found worldwide. In the United States, infestation with head lice is most common among pre-school children attending child care, elementary schoolchildren, and the household members of infested children. Although reliable data on how many people in the United States get head lice each year are not available, an estimated 6 million to 12 million infestations occur each year in the United States among children 3 to 11 years of age. In the United States, infestation with head lice is much less common among African-Americans than among persons of other races, possibly because the claws of the head louse found most frequently in the United States are better adapted for grasping the shape and width of the hair shaft of other races.

Head lice move by crawling; they cannot hop or fly. Head lice are spread by direct contact with the hair of an infested person. Anyone who comes in head-to-head contact with someone who already has head lice is at greatest risk. Spread by contact with clothing (such as hats, scarves, coats) or other personal items (such as combs, brushes, or towels) used by an infested person is uncommon. Personal hygiene or cleanliness in the home or school has nothing to do with getting head lice.

## CAN HEAD LICE BE SPREAD BY SHARING SPORTS HELMETS OR HEADPHONES?

Head lice are spread most commonly by direct contact with the hair of an infested person. Spread by contact with inanimate objects and personal belongings may occur but is very uncommon. Head lice feet are specially adapted for holding onto human hair. Head lice would have difficulty attaching firmly to smooth or slippery surfaces like plastic, metal, polished synthetic leathers, and other similar materials.

## HOW DID MY CHILD GET HEAD LICE?

Head-to-head contact with an already infested person is the most common way to get head lice. Head-to-head contact is common during play at school, at home, and elsewhere (sports activities, playground, slumber parties, camp).

Although uncommon, head lice can be spread by sharing clothing or belongings. This happens when lice crawl, or nits attached to shed hair hatch, and get on the shared clothing or belongings. Examples include: sharing clothing (hats, scarves, coats, sports uniforms) or articles (hair ribbons, barrettes, combs, brushes, towels, stuffed animals) recently worn or used by an infested person; or lying on a bed, couch, pillow, or carpet that has recently been in contact with an infested person. Dogs, cats, and other pets do not play a role in the spread of head lice.

## CAN HEAD LICE BE SPREAD BY SHARING SPORTS HELMETS OR HEADPHONES?

The diagnosis of a head lice infestation is best made by finding a live nymph or adult louse on the scalp or hair of a person. Because nymphs and adult lice are very small, move quickly, and avoid light, they can be difficult to find. Use of a magnifying lens and a fine-toothed comb may be helpful to find live lice. If crawling lice are not seen, finding nits firmly attached within a ¼ inch of base of the hair shafts strongly suggests, but does not confirm, that a person is infested and should be treated. Nits that are attached more than ¼ inch from the base of the hair shaft are almost always dead or already hatched. Nits are often confused with other things found in the hair such as dandruff, hair spray droplets, and dirt particles. If no live nymphs or adult lice are seen, and the only nits found are more than ¼-inch from the scalp, the infestation is probably old and no longer active and does not need to be treated. If you are not sure if a person has head lice, the diagnosis should be made by their health care provider, local health department, or other person trained to identify live head lice.