

The Facts of Lice: How to Detect It, Treat It, Prevent It

Contrary to popular belief, the school environment sees a higher incidence of lice infestation in the winter months. This is because hats, scarves and jackets come in contact with each other, allowing the louse to move from child to child.

Now it's time for a test. See if you can answer these true-or-false questions:

1. Lice prefer a dirty head to a clean head of hair.
2. Lice can jump and fly.
3. Family pets can transmit lice.
4. Lice spread disease.
5. Lice shampoo is all the hair treatment that is necessary to get rid of lice.

Knowledge is your strongest suit of armor in preventing your child from bringing home lice this season.

For starters, homes don't get head lice; people do. The parasite lives off human blood. In fact, the louse will only survive about 24 hours OFF a human host before it starves to death. The adult louse is about the size of a sesame seed and has six legs with claws. It does not have hind legs to jump, nor does it have wings to fly. The louse does crawl very quickly and can move from one head to another (if the heads are touching) in seconds.

Incidentally, all of the above answers are false.

No matter how much you clean your house or what neighborhood you live in, your child will bring home lice if it finds a way to his/her head. Like humans, lice prefer a clean environment. A clean head of hair is lice paradise! Lice are not dangerous, nor do they cause disease. They are, however, highly contagious and annoying. Prevention is key.

Kids and teens are most prone to lice infestation because they like to share their things. Teach your children not to share brushes, combs, hair accessories, hats, headsets, stuffed toys, or towels. Examine your child's heads periodically, especially after complaints of an itchy head or neck. If there has been an exposure, check your child's head even if the symptoms are not apparent.