



Kapa'a Pediatrics, LLC

HEAD LICE

What is it? Pediculosis capitis (head lice) is an infection of the scalp with tiny gray bugs (pediculus humanus capitis). The bugs are 2mm long, gray colored, move quickly, and are difficult to see. They lay 1mm eggs called nits, that firmly attach to the hair shafts near the skin and can't be easily shaken off. Nits turn more white in color after the bug hatches.

Life Cycle and Transmission: The bugs live for about 1 month on the scalp, but can only survive 2-3 days away from the host. They take 8 days to mature to lay eggs, and the eggs take about 8 days to hatch. Transmission is from direct contact.

Symptoms: Itchy scalp (due to the bug biting the scalp and irritation caused from their saliva) and rash around the back of the neck.

Treatment:

First-line treatment can be manual removal or medication application. If you are worried about the side effects of the topical medications then wet combing, hair dryers, or special combs are a good choice. Generally, it is easiest and best just to shave boys hair if they don't mind.

Topical medications for head lice (pediculicides) include permethrin, malathion, benzyl alcohol, spinosad, or ivermectin. Insurance commonly dictates which medication is covered per your insurance plan. Nix (permethrin) is the only over the counter medication but on Kauai there is a high amount of resistance. Thus, if you still see a lot of bugs or nits after the second treatment it is likely that you need a prescription medication.

HOUSEHOLD RECOMMENDATIONS

- Check all household members for infection
- Bedmates can be treated prophylactically
- Wash clothing and linens used by the infested person. Ideally this would occur before and after treatment.
- Vacuum the areas where infected people commonly sit or lay down
- Combs or hair related items can be sealed in a bag for 3 days

*** Patient handouts created by Kapa'a Pediatrics are intended to give parents the most common and pertinent facts about a certain issue. If there is ever any concern that your child was given an incorrect diagnosis or is not following the usual expected course for an illness please call us to speak with a physician. (808) 634-8011***