

## Lice Information Sheet

### What are lice?

Lice are small insects that can be found on infested people's bodies. Different types of lice can be found on different areas of the body. In the United States, the most common type of lice is head lice. Lice feed on blood and lay their eggs, called nits, near the skin on strands of hair.

### How can you catch lice?

Lice are seen most often on young children and are usually spread by direct hair-to-hair contact between two people that can occur while hugging or other close bodily contact. Lice can also spread through sharing personal items, including combs, hats, helmets, towels, and bedding. Lice cannot jump or fly. Dogs, cats, and other pets do not spread lice.

### What are the symptoms of lice?

- Feeling of something moving in or near hair
- Itching (may lead to sores from excessive scratching)
- Irritability and difficulty sleeping
- Redness around the affected area

**Note:** Nits (eggs) appear as small, white specks on hair, like dandruff, but are firmly attached to the hair shaft and will not brush off.

### How can you be treated for lice?

Lice are treated with over-the-counter or prescribed medication that is applied to the infested areas. Sometimes, retreatment with medication and removal of eggs from the hair with a special comb may be necessary. Cloth items should be disinfested by washing and drying at high temperatures (above 130°F) or sealing in a plastic bag and stored for 2 weeks. Combs and brushes used by an infested person can be rid of lice by soaking them in hot water (at least 130°F) for 5–10 minutes.

### How can you prevent lice?

Generally, infestations are easily prevented by the following:

- Avoid hair-to-hair contact during play and other activities at home, school, and elsewhere (sports activities, playground, slumber parties, camp, etc.)
- Do not share clothing such as hats, scarves, coats, sports uniforms, or hair accessories
- Do not share personal hygiene items such as combs, brushes, or towels
- Do not lie on beds, couches, pillows, carpets, or stuffed animals that have recently been in contact with an infested person

**Note:** Fumigant sprays or fogs are not necessary to control head lice and can be toxic if inhaled or absorbed through the skin.