

Pediculosis (Lice)

What are lice?

Lice are insects that live on humans, feeding on blood. There are three species that live on humans, *Pediculus humans capitis*, *Pediculus humans corporis*, and *Phthirus pubis*, causing head, body and pubic/crab infestations respectively. In the hospital setting, there is negligible risk of body lice/pubic lice transmission. The risk of transmission of head lice is low unless there is close, head to head contact between health care worker and patient. Head lice are tiny and move around the head. Their eggs are very small, about 1/3 the size of a sesame seed and take 6-12 days to hatch. They may be mistaken for dandruff; however, the eggs are sticky and hard to remove.

How are lice transmitted?

Lice cannot jump or fly. They spread from one person to another through direct head-to-head contact or through sharing clothing and personal items such as hats or hairbrushes.

NOTE: Head lice do not cause illness or spread disease.

When is a person infectious?

Hatching of nymphs can vary from 6-10 days after eggs are laid on the head. A person can be infectious as long as the lice or eggs remain on the infested person.

How do I know if I have lice?

- Head lice are found most often behind the ears and near the nape of the neck.
- The adult louse is tan, brown, or gray in color. Nits are usually white or yellow and are difficult to remove.
- You may be asymptomatic. Scalp may start feeling itchy weeks or even months after lice have spread. Scratching can make the skin raw, which may ooze clear fluid or crust over and it may get infected. In severe cases, hair may fall out and skin may get darker in areas infested with lice.
- Use a fine tooth comb to look for lice and eggs. Get confirmation from someone who is experienced at checking for lice.

How do I prevent the spread of lice?

- Good hand hygiene
- Do not share combs/clothing/pillows/bedding/blankets between patients
- Wear appropriate PPE such as gloves when in direct contact with a lice infested patient
- Tie hair up
- Use plastic covered pillows/protected chairs in communal areas
- Use the wet combing method to check hair for lice
- If symptoms occur, get treated early
- Check family members or other close contacts for lice

When is an employee exposed?

An employee is exposed when there is direct/indirect hair-to-hair contact with an infested person prior to 24 hours of effective treatment.

What happens if an employee is exposed?

Employees should contact the Workplace Health Call Centre Occupational Health Nurse (WHCC OHN) at 1-866-922-9464. The WHCC OHN will recommend follow-up. This will include recommended treatment and could include time off work if lice are confirmed.

Manager/Supervisor Responsibilities:

Suspected Outbreak or staff exposure from patient: consult with Infection Control. Infection Control will confirm diagnosis, notify and collaborate with the Workplace Health Call Centre Occupational Health Nurse (WHCC OHN). No additional action required until confirmation of lice exposure.

Confirmed Outbreak/Staff exposure: Infection Control will inform the WHCC OHN of the confirmed exposure. The WHCC OHN will send out an exposure notification memo to the manager.

Please advise all staff members to review the information above. Advise employees who have lice or employees that meet the exposure criteria to contact the WHCC OHN at 1-866-922-9464.

Employee Responsibilities:

Infested or exposed employee: contact the WHCC OHN at 1-866-922-9464 and review the information above.

Additional Information/References:

- Canada Communicable Disease Report. [Prevention & Control of Occupational Infections in Health Care](#). March 2002. Retrieved on Mar 26, 2018
- HealthLinkBC Topic: [Head Lice](#). Dec 2016. Retrieved on Mar 26, 2018.
- HealthLinkBC Topic: [Lice](#). May 2017. Retrieved on Mar 26, 2018.
- BCCW Infection Prevention & Control Manual. Retrieved April 6, 2018.
http://policyandorders.cw.bc.ca/resource-gallery/Documents/Infection%20Control/IC.06.02_Lice_Final%20Dec%2015%202016.pdf

This information is current as of April 6, 2018 and is subject to change.