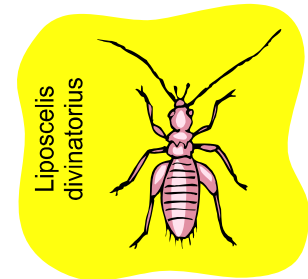


HEAD LOUSE

The head louse is still today alive in abundance in all parts of the world. The louse does not cause danger to the health of people. It is no respecter of persons and is not a testimony of uncleanliness. The louse is contracted through physical contact and from time to time epidemics will arise especially where children stay together e.g. in kindergartens and primary school.



The louse is 2-3 mm when fully developed however it can be difficult to detect the louse and the immature louse can hardly be seen with the bare eyes. It cannot be eliminated through normal hair wash and it is close to impossible to drown the louse. The louse becomes mature in ten days and then starts laying eggs called nit. The nit can be seen as a small node in the hair close to the scalp and sticks to the hair. The nit will hatch in a period of six to ten days.

The main options for treatment:

- The first rule is to search for the louse by combing the hair with a louse comb. Sufficient light is necessary and it is important to have a bright underlay so the louse may be seen if it comes loose from the hair.
- In the event that a case of lice is detected an anti-lice drug must be applied to the hair. The drug can be obtained prescription free from the pharmacy. Remember to treat only the person on whom louse is detected. It is not necessary that all family members or the pupils in a class receive treatment as this could cause immunity by the louse towards the drug. It is important to follow closely the instructions and it is recommended to get advice from the pharmacy staff or from health care center staff. Pregnant women and children under the age of two should not use the drugs except according to physicians advice.
- Following treatment the hair must be combed regularly in order to make certain that the treatment has been successful. Usually it is recommended to repeat the treatment in one or two weeks because the nit may have survived the treatment. The nit can be loosened from the hair by applying to the hair a mixture of vinegar and water in equal measures and then combing the hair with a louse-comb dipped in vinegar.
- The clothes and bed linen of the person infected by louse or nit must be cleaned. The louse will die in 30 minutes at 50°C and the nit is destroyed in one hour. Likewise the louse will die in 30 minutes at -50°C and the nit in four hours. The items not possible to wash or freeze can be vacuum cleaned. The louse can live for over 50 hours without nourishment.

Most of all it is important to work with diligence when treatment against lice is applied as indifference will cause the lice to thrive and spread. It is also important to inform the school and kindergarten when lice have been detected in a child.

Further information available on the web page of the Directorate of Health: www.landlaeknir.is