Lice Myths & Facts

**Myth:** Lice jump, fly, hop from people, animals or environment onto your head
**Fact:** Human lice are only transmitted between people and never come from animals
**Fact:** Head lice can only crawl (not fly) from human head to head
**Fact:** Adult lice can only live a maximum of 48 hours off of a human head; baby lice (nymphs) can survive only a couple hours
**Fact:** Transmission of head lice from inanimate objects (the environment) is very uncommon
**Study:** only 4% live lice were found on infested subjects' pillowcases
**Study:** over 450 students had active infestations, but the floors of their 108 classrooms did not have even one louse - they were completely uninfested  http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/
**Check the Experts:** http://www.cdc.gov/lice/head/faqs.html

**Myth:** Lice is at epidemic levels
**Fact:** MN School nurses tell us that lice outbreaks seem to occur each year and they are not seeing an increase over previous years
**Fact:** Outbreaks are not easily eradicated with the OTC pesticide of permethrin due to pesticide resistance
**Fact:** We regularly see live lice on clients’ heads after home treatments of NIX and RID (permethrin based products)
**Check the Experts:**

**Myth:** Lice is easy to get (casual contact)
**Fact:** This actually depends on the level of infestation of the neighboring head.
**Fact:** Lice have to have very specific spatial and kinetic conditions in order to crawl over to grasp a hair of a neighboring head
**Study:** only 7.1% of hair to hair transmission attempts worked (34 out of 480); the louse had to be oriented outward on the hair (not ready to feed at the base of scalp), the neighboring hair had to be parallel to the hair the louse was on, the neighboring hair had to move very slowly (4 m per minute)  http://www.nature.com/jid/journal/v119/n3/full/5601602a.html
**Check the Experts:**

**Myth:** Re-infestation from classmates is common
**Fact:** Re-infestations are often the same infestation which was never completely eradicated and has erupted again.
**Fact:** The Head Lice Life Cycle illustrates that a couple of missed nits can take upwards of 19 days (almost 3 weeks!) to become adults before a new egg is even laid - and most likely another week before enough nits are visible to spot. That's one month, well outside the recommended two week time frame to check after an infestation.
**Check the Experts:** http://www.holdfast.sa.gov.au/site/page.cfm?u=798
**Myth:** If you have head lice you must have poor hygiene  
**Fact:** Lice are opportunistic bugs, surviving only on human blood; they are not affected by cleanliness or dirtiness in their need to survive  
**Fact:** Lice like clean and healthy scalps; experts believe dirty hair is slippery therefore harder to glue nits (eggs) to  
**Check the Experts:**  
http://www.cdc.gov/lice/head/epi.html  

**Myth:** If one person has lice you should treat the entire family  
**Fact:** Doing correct head checks on all family members is crucial; treating all "to be safe" is an unnecessary waste of time and energy  
**Check the Experts:**  
http://www.extension.umn.edu/distribution/housingandclothing/dk1030.html

**Myth:** You have to have an itchy head to have lice  
**Fact:** You can have lice up to 4-6 weeks before you begin itching your scalp and 50% of infested people have no symptoms at all  
**Fact:** In ongoing infestations habituation can occur and itching decreases  
**Fact:** Lice bites and nits are commonly found behind the ears, crown of head and nape of neck  
**Check the Experts:**  
http://www.cdc.gov/lice/head/disease.html  

**Myth:** Head lice transmit diseases  
**Fact:** Head lice are not carriers of pathogens  
**Fact:** Body lice, a completely different strain of lice, do transmit pathogens  
**Check the Experts:** http://www.cdc.gov/lice/

**Myth:** Nits (eggs) will hatch after pulled off the hair  
**Fact:** Nits need a warm incubator (the head) and humidity in order to hatch  
**Fact:** Nits are laid close to the scalp and are viable within 1/4 inch from the scalp  
**Fact:** Nits found 1/2 inch or more away from scalp are no longer viable  
**Check the Experts:** http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/idepc/diseases/headlice/forhcp.html