

Children's Health

A Real Head Scratcher For Parents

(NAPSA)—Each year, approximately 6 to 12 million children between the ages of 3 and 12 years of age are infested with head lice—causing many parents to scratch their heads and wonder what they did wrong. The answer: probably nothing.

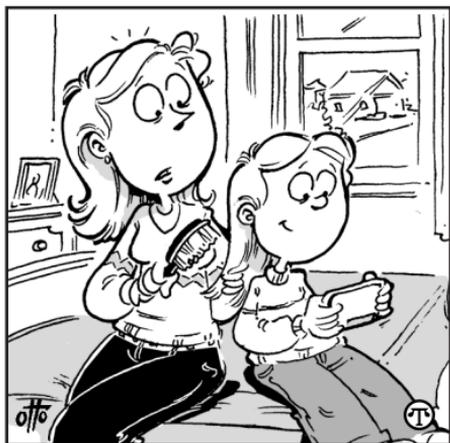
Learning more about this common infestation may help parents avoid some of the embarrassment and misunderstanding associated with it.

Head lice are parasites that survive by feeding on human blood. To survive, a live louse will inject small amounts of saliva and remove small amounts of blood from the scalp every few hours.

Generally found on the scalp, around the ears and at the nape of the neck, the adult louse is about the size of a sesame seed and can be a yellowish-gray or reddish-brown color. Eggs, or nits, are smaller and are silver in color.

Traditional treatments for head lice include nit picking with a fine-tooth comb, over-the-counter and prescription shampoos as well as homeopathic therapies.

However, there are alternative treatments on the horizon that are believed to kill head lice without a neurotoxic mode of action. Currently, there is a non-neurotoxic product that has completed clinical trials and is under review by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration. Trials demonstrate that this product kills head lice by asphyxiation. Studies indicate that the product may prevent lice from closing their breathing apparatus, called spiracles, thus allowing asphyxiation to occur. If approved, this product could potentially be the first prescrip-



Head lice are not a sign of poor hygiene. Anyone can get them, but they're most commonly found in children.

tion, non-neurotoxic product for the treatment of head lice.

The most common symptom of head lice is head scratching caused by sensitivity to the louse's saliva, although red bite marks may also be noticed.

Lice infest all socioeconomic groups, races, genders and ages, but are more commonly found in children due to their close contact with each other. Lice are not a sign of poor hygiene and they do not transmit disease. Infestation can occur throughout the year, although a peak is generally experienced during summer and back-to-school time periods.

While lice are not considered an infectious disease, transmission from one individual to another can occur during direct contact or through the sharing of personal items such as hats, helmets, brushes or combs.

If your child experiences symptoms of head lice, consult a medical professional who can recommend appropriate treatment.