Infection Prevention and Control – Pediculosis (Head Lice)  
Strength of Evidence Level: 3  

PURPOSE:
The purpose of this procedure is to prevent transmission of and eliminate head lice.

CONSIDERATIONS:
1. Contact the local public health department for guidance and resources for local and regional outbreaks of parasitic disease.
2. Head lice: (Pediculus humanus capitis) Adult head lice are 2.1-3.3 mm in length. Head lice infest the head and neck and attach their eggs to the base of the hair shaft. Lice move by crawling; they cannot hop or fly.
   a. Transmission: Head lice infestations are spread most commonly by close person-to-person contact.
   b. Signs: Head lice infestations can be asymptomatic, particularly with a first infestation or when an infestation is light. Itching is the most common symptom of head lice infestation and is caused by an allergic reaction to louse bites. It may take 4 to 6 weeks for itching to appear the first time a person has head lice.
   c. Other symptoms may include: a tickling feeling or a sensation of something moving in the hair; irritability and sleeplessness and sores on the head caused by scratching which can sometimes become infected with bacteria normally found on a person’s skin.
3. General Treatment Guidelines adapted from CDC:
   a. Treatment for head lice is recommended for persons diagnosed with an active infestation.
   b. Everyone in close contact, such as other household members, should be checked and the state public health recommendations followed regarding whom, if anyone, should be prophylactically treated.
   c. All infested persons (household members and close contacts) and their bedmates should be treated at the same time.
   d. Treating the infested person(s) requires using an over-the-counter (OTC) or prescription medication.

EQUIPMENT:
- Magnifying glass
- Gloves
- Gown if staff applying medicated topical treatment
- Cover for staff hair (or secure hair away from face)
- Trash bag for disposal of PPE
- Towel
- Change of clothing for patient
- Plastic trash bag to receive old clothing for laundry

Medication as ordered, nit comb usually included. If the infested person has longer than shoulder length hair, a second bottle of medication may be needed.

PROCEDURE:
1. Professional staff who are applying medication don gown, gloves, hair cover or hair securement prior to patient contact.
2. Before applying treatment, have patient remove clothing that can become wet or stained during treatment.
3. DO NOT use a creme rinse, a combination shampoo and conditioner, or a conditioner alone before using lice medicine.
4. Apply medication, according to the instructions contained in the box or printed on the label, including precisely how long the medication should be left on the hair and how it should be washed off.
5. Have the infested person put on clean clothing.
6. Comb dead and any remaining live lice out of the hair using a fine-toothed nit comb. Nit (head lice egg) combs, often found in lice medicine packages, should be used to comb nits and lice from the hair shaft. Many flea combs made for cats and dogs are also effective.
7. DO NOT re-wash the hair for 1 to 2 days after the lice medicine is removed. If a few live lice are still found 8 to 12 hours after treatment, but are moving more slowly than before, do not retreat. The medication may take longer to kill all the lice.
8. If, after 8 to 12 hours of treatment, no dead lice are found and lice seem as active as before, the medicine may not be working. A different medication may be needed. Contact the physician for new orders.
9. After each treatment, some one must check the hair and comb with a nit comb to remove nits and lice every 2 to 3 days to decrease the chance of self-reinfestation. This procedure needs to continue for 2 to 3 weeks to be sure all lice and nits are gone.
10. Follow Up Measures to avoid Reinfestation: Head lice do not survive long if they fall off a person and cannot feed. Follow these steps to help avoid re-infestation by lice that have recently fallen off the hair or crawled onto clothing or furniture.
   a. Machine wash and dry clothing, bed linens, and other items that the infested person wore or used during the 2 days before treatment using the hot water (130°F) laundry cycle and the high heat drying cycle. Clothing and items that are not washable can be dry-cleaned.
   OR
   b. Seal items in a plastic bag and store for 2 weeks.
   c. Soak combs and brushes in hot water (at least 130°F) for 5-10 minutes.
   d. Vacuum the floor and furniture, particularly where the infested person sat or lay. However,
the risk of getting infested by a louse that has fallen onto a rug, carpet or furniture is very small.

e. Head lice survive less than 1 to 2 days if they fall off a person and cannot feed; nits cannot hatch and usually die within a week if they are not kept at the same temperature as that found close to the human scalp. Spending much time and money on housecleaning activities is not necessary to avoid reinfection by lice or nits that may have fallen off the head or crawled onto furniture or clothing.

f. DO NOT use fumigant sprays; they can be toxic if inhaled or absorbed through the skin.

AFTER CARE:

1. Retreatment:
   a. Generally is recommended for most prescription and non-prescription drugs after 9 to 10 days in order to kill any surviving hatched lice before they produce new eggs.
      [NOTE: However, if using the prescription drug malathion, retreatment is recommended after 7 to 9 days ONLY if crawling bugs are found.]
   b. Usually is recommended because no approved pediculicide is completely ovicidal. To be most effective, retreatment should occur after all eggs have hatched but before new eggs are produced.
   c. Schedule varies depending on the medication used.

REFERENCES: