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TINEA CAPITIS

Tinea capitis (TIN-ee-uh CAP-i-tis) is an infection of the scalp (head) which is caused by a fungus. It is also called ringworm. (This is **not** caused by a worm.) It occurs most often in school-age children but in rare cases can also affect adults. Tinea capitis is very contagious (spreads easily), especially within families.

HOW THE INFECTION IS SPREAD

The fungus is usually spread by coming in contact with infected hairs on combs, brushes, hats, or pillow cases. The fungus can also spread through the air.

SYMPTOMS OF TINEA CAPITIS

Tinea capitis can affect parts of the scalp or all of it. It looks like bald patches with black dots where the hair has broken off. The skin may be dry and scaly. Some areas may be red and tender. There may be areas of raised, crusty bumps. The child may have a low-grade fever of 100° to 101°F, and may have swollen glands (lumps) in the neck.

DIAGNOSIS

The child should be examined by a doctor. A diagnosis can be made by examining the infected areas of the scalp. Sometimes, the doctor will use a swab to take a sample of the affected area and send it to the lab. It usually takes 3 weeks to get the lab results back.

TREATMENT

- After the diagnosis is made, the doctor will prescribe a medicine to be taken by mouth. The medicine goes through the bloodstream into the growing hairs and stops the spread of the fungus to the rest of the hair. Give this medicine with fatty foods such as whole milk, cheese, ice cream, or yogurt. These foods help the body absorb the medicine.
- Your child should take this medicine for as long as your doctor prescribes (usually 4 to 8 weeks). The infection may come back if the medicine is stopped too early.
- The doctor will also prescribe a special shampoo. The shampoo stops the spread of the fungus through the air. Shampoo the child's hair as instructed by your doctor (Picture 1).
- The shampoo will decrease the spread of the fungus, but will not get rid of it.



Picture 1 The special shampoo should be used as directed.

PREVENTION

- You may also be instructed to use the shampoo for children in the home who **do not** have tinea capitis. It should be used 2 or 3 times a week for about 6 weeks.
- Tinea capitis rarely occurs in adults, so adults in the home who do not have tinea capitis do not need to use the shampoo.
- No one should share towels, combs, hairbrushes, hats, or pillowcases with other family members, friends, or visitors.
- Wash the towels in warm, soapy water after each use. Rinse and dry.
- It is important to clean combs and hair brushes well. Soak the combs and brushes in a solution of half bleach and half water for 1 hour a day. Do this for the first 3 days after you start using the shampoo and giving the medicine. After the 3 days, clean brushes and combs as you usually do.

OTHER INFORMATION

- In some cases it may be necessary to keep your child out of school. Your doctor will tell you when your child may return to school.
- If your child needs to take the medicine for longer than 8 weeks, your doctor may order some blood tests to check for any side effects of the medicine.
- There is usually no permanent hair loss if the treatment plan is followed.

If you have any questions, be sure to ask your doctor or nurse.