

# Head lice crusader says the battle is unrelenting

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A Georgetown woman who started up a mobile lice removal service said there isn't enough time in the day to keep up with the number of cases she could treat and calls the situation here "a nightmare."

Kelly McDowell said she first noticed the problem while working for a national drug store chain in Georgetown and after watching some instructional lice removal videos on YouTube, quit her job and started up her own business, The Hair Pixie.

She makes house calls and claims her seven-step treatment process is cheaper and more effective than what other services offer.

"Honestly, I'm not in it for the money. I started it to help and then it got crazy," said McDowell, who runs a daycare out of her home with five children, whom she checks weekly for lice.

"Parents call me in the middle of the night, freaking out, when they find their kids with it. It was actually upsetting because I was making so much money doing this. I know that sounds odd and anybody else would've been happy with that. But no, for me, I'm thinking,

'Is it really this bad in town?'"

McDowell, a former nurse, guarantees she can remove lice from a household (with some stipulations) that requires two visits at a total cost of \$90, but the cleaning of bedding, carpets, clothing and any other fabric material the lice can latch onto are the responsibility of the homeowner.

She says it's a frustrating battle, with uninformed parents either refusing to acknowledge the problem or unwilling to do the extensive work required to eradicate the lice. It is possible for parents to remove the lice themselves, but McDowell said that only has a 50-per-cent success rate and that removing live lice isn't the main concern. It's the thousands of eggs that are produced and can coat strands of an infected person's hair— including parents and grandparents.

"More than once I've done a house call in the morning and after I've gone through the kids' hair— while their mother sat there not cleaning the bedding or anything— and she'll tell me they've got birthday party at the house in the afternoon," she said.

"A lot of the problem is ignorance and I've witnessed many confrontations between parents who are spending all of this money treating their kids when others aren't and



**Five-year-old Lorelei Fox has her hair inspected by The Hair Pixie, Georgetown's Kelly McDowell. McDowell operates a daycare centre out of her home and supplements her income by making house calls to rescue families who have discovered that head lice have infested their homes.**

Photo Eamonn Maher

they bring it back into school. It turns out one of the kids had a lice comb and brought it to school every day in his pocket."

One local woman, who didn't want to give her name, called *The Independent & Free Press* last month to say that both of her children and many others on their street were found to have head lice, which some of the parents suspect came from a summer sports camp that a few of the kids had attended.

"Head lice is not a seasonal thing," added McDowell, who's been running the business for about five years.

"They used to have nurses in the schools who checked for lice, but not anymore, unless you have a teacher who knows what to look for, and then they have to ask the principal to act on it. Parents end up having to take time off work because their kids can't get back into school until they've seen the Wee Care Nurse and that can take three days."

## What you need to know about lice

Here are some tips from The Hair Pixie if head lice make themselves comfortable in your home:

- Home remedies like vegetable oil and hair conditioners only kill live lice, not the eggs
- Picking the pinhead-size nits off the head is the only secure way to remove them
- Tea tree oil is an effective method, but be sure to dilute it with water because it can burn the scalp
- Lice love clean hair, but not products such as hairspray, gel and mousse. Shaving the head clean won't fix the problem either. Barbers and hairdressers will stop cutting hair if they notice nits and will subsequently have to thoroughly clean their shop and equipment
- Favourite hangouts for lice include seats in movie theatres airplanes. Bring a cloth along to cover the fabric and then discard afterward
- There are about 3,000 types of Pediculosis, including bird and fish lice

Lisa Bowen, a pharmacist at Young's Pharmacy & Homecare on Main St. in Georgetown, said staff members been making recommendations for various age groups, for people with specific allergies to ingredients, for proper timing of the application to the hair and strategies for cleaning of personal items to help prevent its spread.

"While we haven't seen an unusually large 'spike,' September is definitely a time where there is a greater opportunity for transmission as children are in closer proximity in schools/daycares and may share personal items such as hats, helmets, brushes, combs, etc."

"I think it is really important for parents and caregivers to be aware of how head lice spread, how to check the head/hair for lice and nits, and how to use the treatments safely and effectively."

The Halton District School Board and Halton Catholic District School Board maintain the same "No Nit Procedure" policy, regarding head lice, referring to Pediculosis as a nuisance and not a medical disease.

The parents of students suspected to have head lice must contact a screening agency to confirm whether infestation has taken place and the student won't be permitted to return to the classroom until all nits, eggs and live lice have been removed and clearance has been given by the agency or a medical practitioner.

The Hair Pixie does not operate a website but can be contacted at 647-206-9017 or by email [thehairpixie@hotmail.com](mailto:thehairpixie@hotmail.com)

McDowell noted that lice treatment is a booming business in some places with salon-style shops sprouting up in the U.S., including one in Beverly Hills.

Locally, Hamilton-based Lice Squad Canada offers removal services and products that are "parent and teacher trusted."

A study presented this month at the National Meeting & Exposition of the American Chemical Society showed that all but five samples collected across 30 states appeared to have high resistance to pyrethroids, the active ingredient to in many over-the-counter treatments.

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