

Hair and scalp disorders in children: Common issues and treatments.

Kelvin Burchell*

Department of Pediatrics, University of South Alabama, United States

Introduction

Hair and scalp disorders are common concerns for parents of young children. From cradle cap in infants to dandruff in school-aged children, these conditions can affect children of all ages and are often a source of worry for both parents and caregivers. Understanding the most common hair and scalp disorders and their treatments can help parents provide the best care for their children's hair health [1].

Cradle cap is a common condition that affects infants, typically appearing in the first few months of life. It presents as thick, greasy, yellowish scales or crusts on the scalp. Although cradle cap is not harmful and does not cause discomfort, it can be unsightly and alarming for parents. It is thought to result from overactive sebaceous (oil) glands, which are stimulated by maternal hormones [2].

Treatment: Cradle cap usually resolves on its own within a few months. However, gentle treatment can help alleviate the condition. Using a mild baby shampoo and soft brush to remove the scales can be effective. In more persistent cases, a pediatrician may recommend medicated shampoos containing ingredients like zinc pyrithione or corticosteroid creams to reduce inflammation [3].

Dandruff is often mistaken for cradle cap but tends to appear later in childhood. Seborrheic dermatitis in children may present as flaky, dry skin or yellowish, greasy scales on the scalp, eyebrows, or other areas of the face. It can be caused by a variety of factors, including an overproduction of oil on the scalp, yeast overgrowth, or environmental triggers like cold, dry air [4].

For mild cases, using gentle shampoos specifically designed to treat dandruff can help. Shampoos containing salicylic acid, ketoconazole, or selenium sulfide may be effective in controlling the symptoms. Parents should ensure the product is suitable for their child's age and follow the recommended guidelines to prevent irritation. In more severe cases, a pediatric dermatologist may prescribe topical treatments [5].

Head lice are a highly contagious problem that mainly affects school-aged children. These tiny insects live on the scalp and feed on blood. Symptoms include itching, red bumps on the scalp, and the presence of lice or their eggs (nits) in the hair. Head lice are spread through close contact or sharing personal items like hats or hairbrushes [6].

Treatment for head lice includes over-the-counter shampoos, lotions, or creams containing permethrin or pyrethrins, which kill the lice. Parents should carefully follow the instructions on the product to ensure it's used correctly. Combing the hair with a fine-toothed nit comb to remove lice and nits is also crucial. In some cases, prescription medications or other treatments like essential oils may be recommended [7].

Alopecia areata is an autoimmune condition where the body's immune system mistakenly attacks hair follicles, leading to sudden hair loss. It typically results in smooth, round patches of hair loss on the scalp, but it can also affect eyebrows and eyelashes. The exact cause is unknown, but it is thought to have a genetic component [8].

Although there is no cure for alopecia areata, treatment options are available to help promote hair regrowth and manage symptoms. These may include corticosteroid injections or topical treatments to reduce inflammation and stimulate hair growth. In some cases, hair may regrow on its own, although it may fall out again. Counseling may also be helpful for children coping with the emotional impact of hair loss [9].

Tinea capitis, or scalp ringworm, is a fungal infection that causes hair loss, scalp irritation, and the appearance of scaly patches. It is highly contagious and can spread through direct contact or sharing items like hairbrushes, hats, or towels. It is more common in children aged 3-7 years. Oral antifungal medications are typically required to treat tinea capitis, as topical treatments are not effective for this condition. A healthcare provider may prescribe medications like griseofulvin or terbinafine. In addition to oral treatment, parents should disinfect personal items and limit the child's exposure to others until the infection is resolved [10].

Conclusion

Hair and scalp disorders in children are common but manageable. By recognizing the symptoms early and seeking appropriate treatment, parents can help their children maintain healthy hair and a comfortable scalp. Consulting with a pediatrician or dermatologist is crucial for persistent or severe cases, as they can provide tailored advice and treatment options. Through gentle care and proper treatment, most hair and scalp conditions can be resolved or controlled, allowing children to grow with confidence and comfort.

*Correspondence to: Kelvin Burchell, Department of Pediatrics, University of South Alabama, United States. E-mail: kelvin.b@southalabama.edu

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