



CHAPTER ELEVEN

HEAD LICE

“Don’t Poison Your Child With Pesticide Treatments!”

Few things can strike such fear in the hearts of parents as head lice! While the bloodsuckers rarely, if ever, cause direct harm or transmit disease, they cause parents to engage in everything from blaming to explaining. They wonder where their child got the lice, worry that it reflects on their parenting abilities, and even offer explanations about their housekeeping and cleanliness.

Head lice, according to Harvard researcher Richard J. Pollack, “do not respect socio-economic distinctions. They don’t care who you are, and have nothing to do with your level of hygiene. We’re just as likely to find them on children who live in million dollar estates as in children who live in far lesser conditions,” he adds. “Virtually anyone at some level is at risk.”

Every year, an estimated 6 million to 12 million people—mostly children—and their families get head lice and they are becoming resistant to the leading chemical treatment used to combat them.

The treatments can often be worse than the lice. Parents turn to prescription medications with high concentrations of permethrin when over-the-counter versions fail. Some parents resort to everything from kerosene to chemicals intended to put on dogs to kill fleas.

Recommended alternatives to permethrin include pediculicides or anti-lice medications containing lindane and malathion, both available by prescription. But neither is without risk. Dr. Paul Auwaerter, assistant professor of medicine at Johns Hopkins University says that lindane can have unpleasant side effects like stinging sensations. However, others feel much stronger about the negative effects of lindane and pediculicides.

Steve Tvedten’s book, *Best Control*, says: “Lindane, has been banned in 18 countries and severely restricted in 10 others. It has not been produced in the U.S. since 1977, but it is still imported here. You may still find lindane as the active poison ingredient in flea collars, moth, and other household sprays. As a scabicide poison (against lice) on children it may be present in lotions, creams, and shampoos.

Lindane (gamma-HCH) is one of the few organochlorine pesticides left on the market. It is the active ingredient in products best known by the brand name KWELL, now available only in generic form. Lindane is frequently used on young children, pregnant women, nursing mothers, and the elderly. These groups are most at risk from lindane’s adverse effects.”

