

# Head Lice Information for Parents

## GENERAL INFORMATION

Head lice are a common problem in our community. They are highly communicable, but can be controlled. Head lice are difficult to deal with, but the following information will aid in your understanding and treatment of these small parasitic insects.

Head lice are also called Pediculosis Capitis. They are a parasite and need human blood to survive. They can only survive off the human body for about 48 hours. This means that if a louse "falls off" a student in the building on Friday, it is dead before the students arrive back in the building on Monday. Head lice do not respect any specific age, socioeconomic, or cleanliness level: **anyone** can get them. Lice do not jump or fly, but they are transmitted through the sharing of personal items, such as a comb or hat.

Lice are about the size of a sesame seed and colored various shades of brown, making them difficult to see. They do not like light, and can move very quickly. Female lice lay eggs called nits. Nits hatch approximately 7-10 days after laid. The female louse lays anywhere from 3 to 4 eggs per day on the shaft of a hair. The nits are "glued" to the shaft approximately ¼ inch from the scalp. Nits are the most common form of diagnosing head lice, as they are usually easier to find. They are commonly located at the base of the neck, behind the ears, and at the crown of the head.

When looking for head lice, make sure the child is comfortable and in a well lit area. Go slowly, using a magnifying glass if needed. Signs that your child may have head lice including itching, red bite marks on the scalp and neck, or swollen glands under the arms or in the neck.

Before treating one family member, all members should be checked immediately. Individual treatment is a two step process which involves the use of a pediculocidal product **AND** combing tool made for the purpose of nit removal.

## TREATMENT

1. Begin by removing the child's shirt, and provide a dry towel to cover the child's eyes (this is essential). **DO NOT TREAT IN THE BATHTUB OR SHOWER.** This allows the lice to spread to other parts of the body. Instead, have the child lean over a sink, which confines the lice to the head and neck areas.
2. Using one of several louse remedies, follow the label instructions carefully. Observe all safety guidelines, as some of the chemicals can be harsh if not used properly. Also, consider consulting your obstetrician or other physician if you are pregnant or nursing and are treating yourself or your child. Also, consultation with a physician is recommended in those students with cuts or scratches on the head or neck, or anyone using any other medications. **DO**

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**NOT USE THESE PRODUCTS ON INFANTS.** \*READ ALL PACKAGE INSERTS BEFORE BEGINNING TREATMENT. \* AVOID PERSONAL LICE SPRAYS.

3. Remove all nits, even though it can be very time consuming and difficult. Louse products do **NOT** kill all nits, and those nits left on hair shafts will hatch into adult lice causing a cycle of re-infestation. By using a special combing tool, nit removal can be quite simple. Nit combing is best accomplished when the hair is dry or slightly damp. Note: Some so-called lice combs are only cradle-cap combs, and are ineffective for nit removal.
4. Following nit removal, have the child put on a clean shirt or pajamas.
5. Complete daily nit checks for at least 10 days following treatment. After that, head checks for lice should become a regular part of hygiene. You may or may not have to retreat your child in 7-10 days as stated on the manufacturer's directions. Treat your child only if there is evidence of NEW nits or newly-hatched lice. **DO NOT TREAT YOUR CHILD EVERY DAY**, as this is very irritating to the scalp and will cause your child much pain and discomfort.

### PREVENTION

Machine wash all washable clothing, towels, and bedding in hot water. Dry in a hot dryer for at least 20 minutes. Dry clean all non-washable items.

Thoroughly vacuum carpets, car seats/boosters, pillows, mattresses, upholstered furniture, rugs, and stuffed animals. Seal all other non-washable items in a plastic bag and do not open for 14 days if they cannot be vacuumed or dry-cleaned.

Soak combs, brushes, and hair accessories in lice-killing products for a minimum of 1 hour; or boil in water for a minimum of 10 minutes.

Discourage your child from sharing hats, scarves, hair accessories, combs, and brushes with other children in group settings such as daycare, playgroups, and family outings.

Avoid physical contact with infested individuals and their belongings, especially clothing and bedding. Inspect children on a regular basis.

Report all cases of head lice to your child's school and/or daycare setting. Do not be embarrassed to do so. Also, notify parents of your child's playmates so that they are alerted to a possible outbreak. Prevention and early detection are keys to protecting children from the head lice parasite. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact the school nurse or your child's building principal. He/She will be happy to assist you in any way possible.