

## HEAD LICE INFORMATION FOR PARENTS/STUDENTS

Head lice are tiny insects that live in human hair. They hatch from small, white colored eggs called nits. Nits are firmly attached to the hair frequently behind the ears and at the nape of the neck. Head lice can cause local irritation and itching. An infestation of head lice is generally a minor and temporary annoyance to the child. Head lice are not caused by, or associated with, poor hygiene or parental neglect. Head lice are rarely a medical problem, and do not pose a public health threat. They are not known to spread any disease agents. The greatest danger directly attributable to head lice is from secondary infection due to scratching the skin with dirty fingernails. Head lice cling to hair. They cannot jump from one person to another. Head lice are most readily transmittable by direct head-to-head contact.

### What are head lice?:

- Lice are host specific parasites so human lice don't live on other animals.
- Lice don't jump or fly.
- Lice must feed off human scalp and blood, so they die within 24 hours of separation from human hosts; if they have fallen off hair, they are at the end of the life cycle.
- Head lice hatch from a small egg (nit) that is attached with cement-like substance to the shaft of individual hairs.
- Eggs hatch in about 10 days. Once hatched the head louse matures in less than 2 weeks.
- Female head lice may live from 3 to 4 weeks and lay about 10 eggs per day.
- Head lice infestations do not cause direct harm.
- Head lice do not transmit disease.

### Transmission:

- **The most common means of transmission is through physical/direct (head to head) contact!**
- Indirect transmission is uncommon but may occur via shared combs, brushes, hats, and hair accessories that have been in contact with an infested person.
- Because most transmission is directly from head to head, transmission in schools is not common. Transmission is likely to take place when children are playing in very close contact or sleeping in close proximity to one another.

### Management in school:

- An infestation shall be determined by the school nurse on finding live lice or nits when looking closely through the hair and scalp.
- If nits are found but there are not live lice on the hair, the school nurse shall reinspect within 7-10 school days or in a reasonable period of time, and notify parent/guardians.
- If live lice are found on the hair, the parent/guardian shall be notified by the end of the day via phone, email, and/or a note sent home with the student. The parent/guardian shall be provided information on head lice, methods to eliminate infestation, and directions to examine household contacts for lice or nits. The school nurse may notify parent/guardians of students who have had head-to-head contact in the affected classroom to encourage them to check their children and to treat, if appropriate, and/or examine

other students most likely to have had direct head-to-head contact with the affected student. The school nurse will decide the best plan for the student.

- Direct head-to-head contact with other students should be avoided. The nurse will be available to provide information to students and develop a plan for being in school.

- **Staff shall maintain the privacy of students identified as having head lice.**

#### **Treatment:**

- There are various methods of treatments that can be used to get rid of head lice, but none will eliminate head lice with one treatment. **All methods need to be done on an ongoing basis, repeated at appropriate intervals, to eventually eliminate the lice infestation.**

- Repeated combing (with fine-toothed combs) and shampooing with regular shampoo removes more lice than infrequent combing and shampooing.

- **Manual removal** is effective, but can be difficult and tedious.

- Fine tooth nit removal combs are available.

- Products that purport to loosen the “glue” that sticks the nits have not been proven to have benefit; vinegar may be helpful to remove nits.

- **Heat:**

- Hot air, slightly cooler than a standard hair dryer, applied for 30 minutes, has been demonstrated to kill both eggs and adult lice.

- **Pediculicides** (pyrethrins and permethrins): are available as shampoos or hair rinses, without prescriptions, at pharmacies. When used according to directions:

- 20 to 30% of the eggs remain viable.

- Treatment may be repeated in 7 to 10 days to kill nymphs emerging from eggs that survived the first treatment.

- Resistance of adult lice to these products has been documented.

- Malathione topical is a pediculocide which is more effective than pyrethrins and permethrins. It has significant potential toxicity and is available only by prescription.

- **Occlusive Agents:**

- Greasy substances including mayonnaise, margarine, and olive oil have been used but there is only anecdotal information regarding efficacy.

- It is not clear whether it is successful because it suffocates the lice or repeated hair grooming is the reason it is effective.

- Treatments are non-toxic.

Please let the school nurse, or other adult, know if you have any questions or concerns. And remember that head lice are not a serious, life-threatening health problem!