

SCHOOL DISTRICT LICE INFORMATION TO PARENTS/GUARDIANS

Head lice are very common and always exist in communities and schools. No school is lice free; just as no school is free of the common cold. After a close look at the scientific evidence available and furnished with new knowledge from experts, we look forward to better serving the students and the families of the School District.

The purpose of this document is two-fold: to review district protocol and to offer some additional information to you so that the entire community may become better educated on this topic. The protocol regarding head lice can be found on the district website. These documents reflect standard practice as recommended by the *Center for Disease Control (CDC)*, the *National Association of School Nurses*, and the *Harvard School of Public Health*.

The current recommendations by medical expert's state that students with nits and/or head lice should remain in the school and not be immediately excluded.

Why would medical experts recommend this?

1. Head lice are a nuisance, they do not cause disease and are not dangerous to the child or to others. Children with head lice who are not sick and pose no risk of illness, should not be excluded from school. Children with the common cold, which is easily passed from student to student, are allowed to stay in school.
2. By the time head lice is discovered, this child has usually had them for 3-4 weeks. Therefore, it makes no sense to immediately exclude them from class.
3. No matter how careful staff is to protect the privacy of student, when a student leaves a class and does not return, the assumption is that the student has head lice. This can be unnecessarily embarrassing for the child and family.
4. Most importantly, school is not a high-risk area of getting head lice. Over the last 10 years, multiple studies have proven the school rarely is the site of lice transmission. The vast majority of cases of head lice are spread by friends and family members who play or live together. In the rare case when the spread of lice has occurred at school, it is among very young children, in preschool or kindergarten and likely a result of playing closely together in ways that result in head-to-head contact.
5. Head lice elicit an emotional reaction. "No-nit" policies were based on that reaction, not on scientific evidence of lice transmission. Scientific research has informed us that keeping students with nits (eggs) or even head lice, out of school has no effect on the amount of head lice at school. Experts agree that "No-nit" policies are detrimental to the emotional and educational status of the student.

Protocol for Head Lice

1. When there is a report of head lice or if a student is suspected of having head lice, a school nurse or designated school employee will discretely check the referred student for live lice or nits (eggs). If student is found to have live lice or nits, the siblings of the student may also be checked. Extreme care should be taken to protect the privacy of the student and family.
2. If live lice are found, a parent/guardian will be immediately notified and be provided information about evidence-based treatment options and steps to follow.
3. At the parents' discretion, the student may be checked-out or sent home at the end of the school day. The student should be treated before returning to school. Head lice should not contribute to student absenteeism; therefore, removal from the classroom is usually unnecessary. If the student returns to class before receiving treatment, it is helpful to limit participation in activities involving head-to-head contact or sharing of personal items.
4. Classroom-wide or grade-level lice checks are unnecessary. However, if additional cases of head lice are reported or found in the classroom, the Principal may choose to send home an information letter to parents of that class.
5. The school nurse or designated school employee may follow-up on cases of head lice as needed.

Myths & Realities about Head Lice

Definitions	
Lice: More than one louse.	Nit: Eggs, dead or alive, of a louse
Louse: Small insect that lives on the scalp.	Parasite: Lives off another, in this case the blood of humans.
Pediculosis: Having an infestation of lice.	Infestation: Having an insect present, in this case, in your head.
Myths	Truths
Head lice are easy to get.	Lice are spread only mainly by head-to-head contact. They are much harder to get than a cold, flu, ear infection, pink eye, strep throat, food poisoning, or impetigo.
You can get lice from your dog, guinea pig, or other animal.	Lice are species-specific. You can only get human lice from another human. You cannot get another animal's lice.
You can get head lice from hats and helmets.	Rarely, but possible. Hairbrushes, pillows, and sheets are also uncommon modes of transmission.
School is a common place for lice transmission.	School is an unlikely source of transmission. Much more common are family members, overnight guests, and playmates who spent a large amount of time together.
Poor hygiene contributes to lice.	Hygiene makes absolutely no difference. You get lice by close personal head-to-head contact with someone else that has lice, not by being dirty.
Lice can jump or fly from one person to another.	Lice can only crawl. They can neither fly nor jump. They must crawl from one person to another.
Any nits left in the hair can cause lice to come back.	Any nits farther away than one quarter to one half on the hair shaft are ALREADY HATCHED and pose no risk to others.
Eggs or nits can fall out of the hair, hatch, and cause lice in another person.	Nits are cemented to the hair and very hard to remove. They cannot fall off. Newly hatched lice must find a head quickly or will die.
Lice can live a long time.	Lice live only 1 to 2 days off the head. Each louse only lives about 30 days on the head.
All members of a family should be treated if one person has lice.	Only the person with lice should be treated. Lice shampoos are INSECTICIDES and can be dangerous if used incorrectly or too frequently. Household members and close contacts should be checked, but only treat those who actually have lice. The house should NOT be sprayed with insecticide, nor used on clothing or other items.
Checking a classroom when one student has lice can prevent lice from spreading.	Classroom transmission is EXCEEDINGLY RARE and checking students is a waste of valuable teaching time. Checking family members and close playmates is much more appropriate.
Avoiding lice is important as they spread disease.	Head lice do not spread any known disease. They are annoying and irritating, but not dangerous.

Additional Resources:

How to Check for Head Lice:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bwwNwzZuv-g>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention <http://www.cdc.gov/parasites/lice/head/schools.html>;

Pediatric Nursing/September-October 2014

<https://www.pediatricnursing.net/ce/2016/article4005226235.pdf>