

Head Lice

Dear Parents,

Welcome back to school! Because head lice are most readily transmitted by direct head-to-head contact, summer camps and slumber parties where children share sleeping quarters, sports activities where helmets might be shared, and increased play time with closer head contact may allow for easier spread. Therefore, it is imperative, especially at the opening of school, for all parents to check their children for lice and to treat them in a timely manner.

What are head lice?

- Head lice are tiny (like sesame seeds), wingless, bloodsucking insects that feed on the human scalp.
- They do not infest animals.
- They cannot live away from the human host longer than 20 hours in our climate.
- They do not fly or jump, but crawl at high speed.
- **This condition is not a reflection of poor hygiene**; conversely lice prefer to feed on clean scalps.

Where do head lice come from?

- Head lice crawl from one head to another.
- The most common method of transfer is by direct head contact between two children.
- Transfer also occurs through shared combs, brushes, hats, hair ribbons, helmets, headphones, etc. Lice can also be picked up from a contaminated article of clothing, a piece of furniture, bed linens or towels.

How do you know if your child has head lice?

- Individuals with head lice may scratch the scalp to alleviate itching.
- Examine your child weekly to catch an infestation as early as possible. Screen with a magnifying glass and a bright light, parting the hair in ¼ inch strips.
- Finding a live louse on the head is difficult because the louse can crawl 6 to 30 cm per minute. The eggs, or nits, are easier to spot within 1 cm of the scalp. Nits are more difficult to remove than dandruff because they are “glued” on.

What can you do?

- To reduce the chance of head lice infestation, teach your children not to share personal items and to avoid head-to-head contact.
- There are various ways to treat head lice infestation.
- No lice-killing treatment can destroy nits under 4 days old because the central nervous system has not yet developed. These live eggs can hatch, grow and cause re-infestation in just one week. These are the reasons why **complete manual removal of all nits** is vital for head lice elimination.
- Household members should be checked.
- Environmental interventions include washing or drying items at temperatures greater than 130 degrees will kill stray lice or nits.
- Furniture, carpeting, car seats, and other fabrics can be vacuumed.
- Items that cannot be washed can be bagged in plastic for two weeks.

If you have any concerns about your child, a medical condition, or a family medical matter, please feel free to call me. Your support and cooperation are greatly appreciated. As a Certified School Nurse, my goal is to prevent illnesses and maximize each child's health and educational potential.

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