

September 2018

Re: Possible Head Lice

Dear Parents:

As your child's school nurse, I wanted to alert you that a child visited my office today with evidence of head lice. An estimated 6 to 12 million infestations occur each year in the United States, most commonly among children ages 3 to 11, so you are not alone.¹

Head lice are not dangerous. They do not transmit disease, but they do spread easily.¹ **It is important to talk to your family physician or pediatrician to get appropriate care.** A few things to consider include:

- All household members and other close contacts should be checked, and those with evidence of an active infestation should also be treated at the same time.²
- There are a number of available treatments, including new prescription treatment options that are safe and do not require combing out nits from your child's hair.
- Resistance to some over-the-counter head lice treatments has been reported. The prevalence of resistance is not known.^{3,4}
- There is no scientific evidence that home remedies are effective treatments.⁵
- Family bed linens and recently used clothes, hats and towels should be washed in very hot water.²
- Personal articles such as combs, brushes and hair clips should also be washed in hot water if they are in contact with a person with head lice.²
- Both the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) and the National Association of School Nurses (NASN) advocate that "no-nit" policies should be **discontinued**. "No-nit" policies that require a child to be free of nits before they can return to schools should be discontinued for the following reasons:
 - Many nits are more than ¼ inch from the scalp. Such nits are usually not viable and very unlikely to hatch to become crawling lice, or may in fact be empty shells, also known as 'casings'.
 - Nits are cemented to hair shafts and are very unlikely to be transferred successfully to other people.
 - The burden of unnecessary absenteeism to the students, families and communities far outweighs the risks associated with head lice.

Head lice are tiny, wingless insects that live close to the human scalp. They feed on human blood. The eggs, also called nits, are tiny, tear-drop shaped eggs that attach to the hair shaft. They are often found around the nape of the neck or the ears. Nits may appear yellowish or white and can look similar to dandruff. But, unlike dandruff, they can be difficult to remove. Nymphs, or baby lice, are smaller and grow to adult size in one to two weeks. Adult lice are the size of a sesame seed and tan to grayish-white.¹

As you and your family deal with this uncomfortable but common issue, keep in mind that head lice infestations are not related to cleanliness.^{6,7} In fact, head lice often infest people with good hygiene and grooming habits.⁷ Infestations can occur at home, school or in the community. Head lice are mostly spread by direct head-to-head contact—for example, during play at home or school, slumber parties, sports activities or camp. Less often, head lice are spread via objects that have been in recent contact with a person with head lice, such as hats, scarves, hair combs, brushes, etc.^{1,6}

I am here to help you in any way I can. Please do not hesitate to contact me if I can answer any questions or provide you with additional information.

Sincerely,
Nurse Williams
301-869-0940 Ext 5

References

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3. Burkhart CG. Relationship of treatment-resistant head lice to the safety and efficacy of pediculicides. *Mayo Clin Proc.* 2004;79(5):661–666.
4. Meinking TL, Serrano L, Hard B, et al. Comparative in vitro pediculicidal efficacy of treatments in a resistant head lice population on the US. *Arch Dermatol.* 2002;138(2):220–224.
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7. Meinking T, Taplin D, Vicaria M. Infestations. In: Schachner LA, Hansen RC, eds. *Pediatric Dermatology*, 4th ed. Mosby Elsevier; 2011:1525-1583.