

## FYI -- HEAD LICE

**Head lice could be present constantly in up to 5% of pupils in most schools. This would require schools to send out alert letters every day. Your help in inspecting your child at least weekly throughout the school year for the presence of head lice would be greatly appreciated.**

- Head louse is an insect that lives on the human scalp and feeds on blood. They are the size of a sesame seed, they are grayish brown and wingless.
- Schools are not the most common places where head lice are spread, even though schools have been blamed in the past. Sleepovers among friends and relatives are thought to be a common way they are passed home to home.
- Lice do not fly or jump. They do not come from pets and the only way they from one person to another is direct touching.
- Head lice are not a sign of uncleanliness; they love clean hair because it is easier to latch on.
- When found most cases of head lice are already more than a month old. One sign is a red itchy rash on the back of the neck, just below the hair line
- If nits are present, head lice may have been already there but may be gone.
- Head lice hatch from small eggs (nits) that are attached with a cement type substance to the hair shaft of individual hairs. Some simple products that may help. Vinegar, real mayonnaise, olive oil and Dawn Dish soap. These help loosen the cement type substance.
- Eggs hatch within ten days, once they hatch, they will reach maturity in less than two weeks.
- Lice must feed off the human scalp, so they die within twenty-four hours of falling off the scalp. If they fall off, they are at the end of their cycle and are too weak to reproduce. Hats and coats touching in school are not sources of lice and there is no need to separate or bag them. . A louse on a hat or coat is a dying louse who will not be capable of reproducing.
- Never treat or retreat "just in case" in the absence of live lice. Head lice products are pesticides, which are toxic if overused and can be absorbed through the skin. Follow the directions carefully.
- Removing the nits (eggs) and live lice with a special metal-tooth comb is time-consuming but the most effective way to get rid of them. They do not wash out.
- Healthy ones stay close to the scalp until they sense another human head. They cannot survive without blood, that is why they bite.
- School-wide head checks are not recommended or endorsed by the Harvard School of Public Health, the American Academy of Pediatrics or the Centers for Disease Control. The most effective screening occurs when parents check their own children at home, treat if any are found, and make efforts to remove the nits.
- One of the biggest challenges in eliminating head lice is parents' discomfort in communicating about the problem with other parents when they find head lice, so they are more easily passed back and forth among close friends and relatives.
- "No-nit" policies, i.e., not allowing children back into school with nits even though treated, is no longer practiced in most schools because it has been proven that these policies do not impact the spread of lice
- School nurses are supportive advocates School nurses will assist you in checking or rechecking as you work to remove nits and lice from your child's head. Just ask.
- School nurses will not judge you or report you or tell others if you ask for assistance dealing with head lice. We handle lice in a confidential manner. We know that even the best families can catch them, and most of us who are parents have been through it at least once ourselves.

### Sources

American Academy of Pediatrics

<http://aappolicy.aappublications.org/cgi/reprint/pediatrics;110/3/638.pdf>

Harvard School Of Public Health

<http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/headlice.html>

Centers for Disease Control

[http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dpd/parasites/headlice/factsht\\_head\\_lice\\_treating.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dpd/parasites/headlice/factsht_head_lice_treating.htm)