

Head Lice Information (Pediculosis)

Please do not be alarmed, as this is a common occurrence in all schools. Head lice are not a sign of unclean people or homes. Head lice are found worldwide. In the United States, infestation with head lice is most common among preschool children attending child care, elementary school children, and the household members of infested children. Although reliable data on how many people in the United States get head lice each year are not available, an estimated 6 million to 12 million infestations occur each year in the United States among children 3 to 11 years of age.

Please take the following precautions:

1. Check your child's hair for eggs (also called nits). If you suspect your child has head lice, ask your health care provider to recommend appropriate treatment.
2. Tell the school nurse if your child is diagnosed as having head lice; this is CRUCIAL to control their spread.
3. If head lice are diagnosed, do not return your child to school until he or she has been treated.
4. Continue checking daily at home.

Information about head lice:

What are they?

Head lice are tiny insects that live only on people's scalp and hair. They hatch from small eggs (nits) that are firmly attached to the individual hairs near the scalp and cannot be easily moved up or down the hair (as can specks of dandruff). They look like grains of sand. Nits may be found throughout the hair but are most often located at the back of the scalp, behind the ears, and at the top of the head. The eggs hatch in about 10 days, with new lice reaching adulthood in about 2 weeks. The female louse, about the size of a sesame seed, can live for 20 to 30 days and can lay about six eggs a day. The lice live by biting and sucking blood from the scalp. Lice can survive up to 8 hours between feedings and can do so off the body. Until a person with head lice is treated they can transmit them to others.

How should you check for head lice?

You probably will not see the lice, only the eggs. These are tiny, pearl-gray, oval shaped specks attached to the hair near the scalp. Look carefully, using a magnifying glass and natural light. Search for nits at the back of the neck, behind the ears and at the top of the head.

How does a person get head lice?

Anyone who has close contact with an infested person or shares personal items can become infested. Lice are spread only by crawling from person to person directly, or onto shared personal items, such as combs, brushes, head coverings, clothing, bedding or towels. Lice do **NOT** fly or jump.

What should you do about head lice?

If your child does have head lice, your health care provider may want to treat everyone in your family. Everyone should be checked, and anyone with nits should definitely be treated.

To get rid of head lice:

1. Use a medicine that your health care provider prescribes or recommends. Use any of these products very carefully, and consult a physician before treating infants, pregnant or nursing women, or people with extensive cuts or scratches on the head or neck.
2. After appropriate treatment, removal of nits is necessary to prevent spread. Removal is a difficult and time-consuming process because nits have such a firm grip on the hair. A solution of vinegar and water may help loosen nits so you can remove them with a special, fine-toothed comb. You may also use your fingernail to slide them down to the end of the hair shaft.
3. **Check for nits daily for the next 10-14 days.** Then repeat the treatment to kill any newly hatched lice.
4. **Clean personal items and surroundings:**
 - Machine wash all washable and possibly infested items in HOT water. Dry them in a HOT dryer.
 - Put non washable items (furry toys or pillows) in a HOT dryer for 20 minutes or dry clean them.
 - Seal items that cannot be washed or dry cleaned in a plastic bag for 10 days (any eggs or lice present will die in this time).
 - Soak combs and brushes in HOT water for 10 minutes, or wash them with a shampoo approved to kill lice.
 - Thoroughly vacuum rugs, upholstered furniture, mattresses and car upholstery.
 - Do not use insecticide sprays because they can be harmful to people and animals.

When can the student return to school?

In order to return to school, the student must have been treated and be nit free in the opinion of the school nurse (based on her assessment). He/she may NOT ride the bus to school until checked by the nurse. Remember that you must keep checking your child's hair for new nits for at least 2 weeks. Regular checking for lice should be part of your routine.