

Guidelines for Handling Lice in Schools

The school nurse frequently finds him/herself in the tenuous position of balancing the interests of an individual child/family with those of the greater school community. Perhaps no condition exemplifies this more than pediculosis.

Many organizations involved in the health of children recommend (implore) schools to reconsider the “no nit” policy. These include: The Center for Disease Control, www.cdc/ncidod/dpd/parasites/headlice/factsht_head_lice_treating.htm), the National Association of School Nurses (www.nasn.org); the American Academy of Pediatrics (www.aap.org); the New England Journal of Medicine (www.nejm.org), and the Harvard School of Public Health, among others. Locally this position is supported by the UVa Department of General Pediatrics, the Albemarle County Medical Board, Pediatric Associates, and Piedmont Pediatrics.

It may be helpful to review how lice treatments work. Most traditional lice treatments available over the counter are insecticides containing pyrethrins or permethrin. These agents work by attacking the central nervous systems of lice and larva (louse developing in the egg) providing the larva is beyond the embryonic stage with a sufficiently developed central nervous system to respond to the neurotoxicity of the treatment. So if the egg is newly laid when the treatment is applied, the larva may not respond to treatment. Eggs take 6 to 9 days to hatch, do not move to a new host within 7 days of hatching, and don't reproduce until 10 days from hatching -- thus the recommendation to repeat the treatment in 7 to 10 days. Given these facts, families have a grace period of several days to remove the nits before the condition is communicable. In order to greatly diminish the chances of reinfestation nits and eggs should be removed within that time period. If the treatment has been used as directed there is almost no risk of communicability within this time period (Postgraduate Institute of Medicine, 2003)

Lice lay eggs very close to the scalp. As the hair grows the egg or nit moves further from the scalp. This is one way to tell the age of the infestation.

Exclusion for live lice and evidence of an active infestation (many eggs located very near the scalp) is probably in the best interest of all. Instructing parents to work toward removing the nits daily for the following two weeks would be prudent. The school nurse should also continue to check periodically for evidence of reinfestation. Children who have been treated with a pediculocide and still have nits in their hair should be permitted to return to school and the parents should be instructed on the measures necessary to minimize the likelihood of a reinfestation.

To summarize, a child will be sent home if:

- 1) Live lice are detected
- 2) Nits and/or eggs are detected and there is no report or proof of treatment
- 3) Evidence of a reinfestation is present: that is many nits or eggs within 1 cm from the scalp.

A child may stay in school if:

- 1) Parent/guardian provides proof that a treatment was administered and the child still has a few nits remaining.
- 2) A child has a few nits located far from the scalp and reports a past infestation and treatment

The school nurse will check and note the status of the student upon return to school and periodically thereafter until the condition is eradicated. If the nurse detects any of the above conditions for exclusion, the student will be sent home.

Guidelines for Handling Chronic Lice

For the purpose of managing lice outbreaks in the schools, chronic lice will be defined as 5 or more exclusions for lice by the above exclusion criteria in a 3 month period.

If a student's condition constitutes the "chronic" definition as above, the student will be checked daily and excluded for any signs of lice or nits. If, after a two week period, the student has shown no signs of lice or nits, he/she will be checked weekly for two more months and excluded for each recurrence. Parents/guardians will receive very specific instructions on how to eradicate the condition. The student will not be permitted to attend school until nit and lice free. At the principal's discretion a student who misses more than 8 days in a semester or 16 days in a year may receive a notification from the school that further missed days may could result in mandatory summer school retention. If lice related absences continue, the school administration may choose to pursue truancy charges against the family.

A daily egg/nit and lice check is advisable for least 10 days and then every few days after that.

Treatment of personal articles and environment:

- Machine wash all clothing and bed linens which have been in contact with the infested person during the past three days. Articles should be washed in hot water and dried in a hot drier.
- Upholstered surfaces should be vacuumed. This includes car upholstery.
- The use of insecticidal sprays is not recommended because they may be harmful to family members and pets and are of questionable benefit.
- Immerse combs and brushes in very hot water for at least 10 minutes or dispose of them.

Other control measures

- Check other household members and treat if evidence of lice is detected.
- Inform your child's school or day care center and any other contacts such as playmates, fellow party attendees, scouts, or others with whom your child may have come in close contact within the past two weeks.

Can head lice be prevented?

The following measures may help prevent your child from getting head lice or prevent your child from becoming re-infested:

- Check your child regularly for any evidence of infestation.
- Tie back long hair in a ponytail, braid, or bun.
- Avoid sharing brushes, combs, barrettes, headbands, hats, helmets, etc.
- Remind/instruct your child to avoid head to head contact with other children.

Where can I get more information?

You can find up-to-date information on lice from the following sources:

www.hsph.harvard.edu/headlice.html

www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dpd/parasites/lice/factsheet_head_lice.htm

www.headlice.org

Please Read and Save this Important Notice

Dear Parent,

Head lice infestations continue to be a problem in our community. Lice can be transmitted from person to person and are difficult to prevent, but by checking your child's head often an infestation can be prevented or detected early and more easily controlled. This can be a frustrating problem, but the following information may help you identify and treat your child for head lice safely and thoroughly.

What are lice?

Head lice are tiny insect parasites that live on the human head, feeding on the scalp several times a day. Head lice reproduce by laying their eggs on the hair shaft close to the scalp. They are not dangerous, don't carry diseases and are not a sign of poor hygiene.

How are head lice spread?

Head lice are spread by direct head-to-head contact with another person who has head lice. This can occur when children are doing group work, playing, hugging, etc. Head lice can run from one head to another in seconds. Head lice cannot fly, jump, or swim. Although the evidence is limited, there may be some transmission of lice through objects such as hats, hair brushes, and headphones.

What are the signs of head lice?

The scalp may itch as the skin reacts to the saliva of the head lice. Itchiness may take weeks to develop. A child observed frequently scratching the scalp should be checked for head lice. Crawling head lice may be seen in the hair, but they move very quickly and shy away from light so they can be difficult to spot. Adult lice are usually dark brown and about 2 to 3 mm long. Young lice are often lighter brown and about 1 to 2 mm long. Eggs are small and teardrop shaped, white, grayish white or brown, are glued firmly to the hair shaft, and are about the size of a sesame seed.

What should I do if I find lice on my child?

Treatment of the individual: The treatment for lice generally consists of the use of a lice killing product available at pharmacies and drug stores. There are several preparations available over-the-counter. Purchase one of these products and follow the package directions exactly. Although many products claim to kill lice and lice eggs, no product can kill 100% of the eggs since newly laid eggs contain larva that are not mature enough to respond to the treatment, hence the recommendation to repeat the treatment in 7 to 10 days – to kill any lice that hatched from these eggs.

Because no lice killing product can kill 100% of the eggs, manual removing of the eggs is the best way to prevent re-infestation. Eggs and nits can be removed with a special lice comb or by picking them out with the finger nails. The only way to get them out is to pull them to the end of the hair strand and then off. This can be a time consuming task. Nit/egg combing is best accomplished on wet hair.

Instructions for Removing Eggs/Nits

Head lice are a really big nuisance and getting rid of them can be a frustrating challenge, but egg/nit removal is a very important step in successful treatment to reduce the risk of re-infestation.

Chemical lice killing products are effective when used as directed for killing live lice and mature larva in eggs. However, newly laid lice eggs contain insect larva whose neurological system is not mature enough to respond to the treatment. It is these newly laid eggs that go on to hatch and re-infest the individual in 7 to 10 days. This is why no lice treatments are 100% effective at killing all lice eggs.

Removing eggs is the key to successful control. This process is time consuming but critical for success. Egg/nit removal should be done every day as long as nits are present. Below are detailed removal instructions:

- Prepare for this time-consuming task by selecting a place with very good lighting and something to occupy the child such as a video or TV. This may take 2 or more hours. Assemble supplies: nit comb (most effective ones are metal and designed for removing lice and eggs), tissues, hair clips, and a plastic bag.
- After shampooing the hair use conditioner and leave it in the hair. Towel dry then use a regular comb to remove tangles. (If you are using this procedure in conjunction with a lice killing treatment, use regular shampoo after using the lice killing shampoo).
- Starting at the crown of the head, separate a section of hair that is about 1 inch by ½ inch. Hold it out from the head.
- Insert the louse comp at the base of the hair section as close as possible to the scalp and pull the comb slowly through the hair. Be sure to slant the comb so that the curved side of the teeth is towards the head. If you aren't using a comb, go through each small section of hair using your fingernails to pull the eggs off the hair.
- Use tissues to clean any lice or debris from the comb following each combing and put the tissue in a plastic bag. Continue to comb the section of hair until you feel sure it is free of nits, then pin it out of the way with a hair clip and start on the next section of hair. Repeat this process with the next 1 inch section of hair.
- If the hair dries during the combing process, wet it again with water to reduce the pulling and hair loss.
- When all the hair has been combed, rinse it thoroughly with water. After the hair is completely dry, check the entire head for stray nits and remove them individually.
- To clean up, soak the comb in hot soapy ammonia water for 15 minutes or boil it for 15 minutes (only the metal ones). The plastic bag should be sealed and disposed of.

If you have any questions please feel free to call your school nurse.

HOMEOPATHIC LICE TREATMENT

GERANIUM OIL-available at the local Health Food store.

TREATMENT-

THIRTY (30) drops of geranium oil, TWO (2) ounces of olive oil mixed with TWO (2) ounces of shampoo. Wet hair and liberally apply mixture, wrap head in plastic and leave on for at least 30 minutes. Rinse, you may need to add shampoo to remove all the oil.

YOU WILL NEED TO REMOVE THE NITS, THESE SHOULD COMB OUT EASILY AFTER THIS TREATMENT. THIS CAN BE USED DAILY AS NEEDED UNTIL NO SIGNS OF LICE REMAIN. REMEMBER THE LEFTOVER EGGS WILL HATCH IN 7-10 DAYS.

PREVENTION-

TEN(10) drops of geranium oil per 1 ounce of shampoo, shake before use. You may use this daily or 1-2 x a week to prevent head lice-they don't like the smell. Herbal shampoo will help mask the odor.

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LICE TREATMENT

CETAPHIL FACIAL CLEANSER AVAIABLE AT THE DRUG STORE

WET HAIR, APPLY TO SCALP AND ALL OVER THE HAIR, BLOW DRY ON THE HIGHEST HEAT SETTING FOR 15 MIN. COMB THRU HAIR AFTER AND LEAVE ON OVER NIGHT. IN THE MORNING SHAMPOO AND CONDITION AS USUAL.

REMEMBER YOU NEED TO CONTINUE TO REMOVE THE EGGS (NITS) DAILY, AS THESE WILL HATCH IN 7-10 DAYS. YOU CAN DO THIS TREATMENT DAILY OR AS NEEDED.

YOU SHOULD NOT SEE MORE EGGS IN DIFFERENT PLACES, IF YOU DO THIS MEANS THERE ARE MORE LICE IN THE HAIR AND YOU WILL NEED TO RETREAT AS SOON AS POSSIBLE. IF YOU SEE DARK EGGS ON THE SCALP THESE ARE ABOUT TO HATCH AND NEED TO BE REMOVED IMMEDIATELY.

ALL ITEMS USED ON OR NEAR THE HAIR NEED TO BE CLEANED IN HOT SOAPY WATER. BRUSHES, BARRETTES AND COMBS CAN BE RUN THRU THE DISHWASHER. ANY ITEMS THAT CANNOT BE WASHED, SUCH AS STUFFED ANIMALS YOUR CHILD SLEEPS WITH NEED TO BE BAGGED UP TIGHTLY FOR 2 WEEKS. VACUUM ALL CARPETED AREAS AND THROW THE BAG AWAY.