

Pests Come to School, Too! Tips for Parents on Two Common Household Nuisances

As we begin to come into the cooler months of the year, a reminder to all families that two common household pests continue to live year-round in Florida! Please see below for some tips for parents.

Head Lice:

Lice aren't dangerous and they don't spread disease, but they are contagious and downright annoying! Lice cannot jump, hop or fly, but they can run very quickly. Personal hygiene or cleanliness in the home or school has nothing to do with getting head lice. A child cannot "catch nits" – nits (lice eggs) can only be laid by live lice. Here are ways you can help prevent your kids from getting lice:

- The best prevention is continuous surveillance! Inspect your children's heads regularly for signs of head lice and treat anyone who is found to have lice or nits close to the scalp
- Tell kids to try and avoid head-to-head contact with other children while playing or at school
- Tell kids not to share combs, brushes, hats, scarves, bandanas, ribbons, barrettes, hair ties, towels, helmets, or other personal care items with anyone else

Bed Bugs:

Bed bugs are another nuisance that is on the rise! Bed bugs do not transmit disease, but they can cause significant itchiness, anxiety, and sleeplessness. Bed bug infestations are also very difficult and expensive to control. Usually, bed bugs will hide during the day and only come out to feed at night. Unlike head lice, they do not live on a person, but they can hitchhike from one place to another in backpacks, clothing, luggage, books and other items. Actual bed bug infestations in schools are uncommon, but here are ways you can help to stop the spread:

- Like head lice, vigilance against bed bugs is the first line of defense!
- If the school contacts you with news that your child was found with bed bugs in his/her belongings, take it seriously and inspect your home
- Make sure you have good lighting while inspecting – use a flashlight whose light beam can be seen even when overhead lights are on
- Look on bedding or in areas where people sleep the most (sofas, other nap areas). Also check in areas where items brought home from school and sleepovers may congregate

It is a parent's responsibility to remove and eliminate head lice and bed bugs from the home so as not to cause reintroductions into the school, which could put other families at risk of infestation. Pinellas County Schools has a "No Nit" policy towards head lice, which means that any student found with live lice or nits must be excluded from school until all lice and nits are removed. Additionally, any student found at school with any live biting insect or pest will need to be excluded from school until the biting insect or pest is removed. For additional information regarding head lice or bed bug treatment or prevention, please contact your school nurse.