

## **HEAD LICE** **(PEDICULOSIS)**

**DEFINITION:** Head lice are parasites which infest human hair, articles of clothing and upholstered furniture. Head lice pose no great threat to the general public health but cause considerable public and personal annoyance.

**INFECTIOUS AGENT:** The fertile louse lays her eggs at the base of the hair shaft, cementing each egg (nit) on the hair shaft. After a 6 to 10 day period the egg hatches, producing a nymph, which requires a blood meal within 24 hours. The nymph undergoes a molt and after 7 to 10 days, becomes an adult louse. In her 30 day lifetime, an adult female will produce 50 to 300 eggs.

**MODE OF TRANSMISSION:** Head lice cannot fly or jump, but they use hooked legs to crawl rapidly. They are not transmitted by household pets, but can be transmitted by sharing hats, clothing and personal items. Their presence does not indicate an “unclean” head or home.

**METHODS OF CONTROL:** All lice and eggs (nits) on the hair and in the environment must be destroyed. The infestation and reinfestation cycle must be broken by destroying lice through shampooing hair with lice shampoo, and washing clothing and bedding in hot water and placing in dryer on hot cycle.

Non-washable household items (toys and stuffed animals, etc.) should be dry cleaned, vacuumed, or “bagged” (in well-sealed plastic bags) for a minimum of 2 weeks. Lice can survive in the environment for 1 to 2 days. Nits hatch in 6 to 10 days but can be dormant for up to 35 days.

### **Pinellas County Schools has a No-Nit Policy- A No-Nit Policy calls for:**

- The removal of all live lice and nits following application of a lice-killing product.
- The exclusion of a student from school until such measures have been successfully accomplished.
- Education to ensure that parent/guardian understands their responsibilities under the No-Nit Policy. Information in hand outs and lice letters to be sent home with student and class.

## PEDICULOSIS SCREENING PROCESS-

### Target Population:

1. Students, who exhibit the following signs or symptoms of head lice and have suspected infestations, as reported by their classroom teacher, should be examined **near the end of the school day** by school personnel trained in identifying an infestation of head lice.
  - Student complains of intense head itching.
  - Student is observed scratching head frequently.
  - Reddish papules or tiny bite marks may be present on the neck.
  - A close examination of the scalp may reveal small whitish eggs firmly attached to hair shaft especially at the nape of the neck, above the ears, and frequently on the crown. Although dandruff may resemble eggs, dandruff can easily be removed from the hair. The louse egg is attached to the hair with cement secreted by the louse and cannot easily be removed.
  - You will be looking for head lice and nits, most likely located on the scalp or hair shaft near the scalp.
  - It is not standard practice to examine all students in a classroom or school.

### Process:

1. All students found to have live head lice or nits should be excluded from school for treatment. Parent/guardian should be notified by school personnel (not volunteers) that student will need to be treated and examined on return to school, before being permitted to return to class.
2. Parent/guardian should be provided current, accurate impartial information to assist with the treatment process.
3. Treatment and return to school should occur in a timely manner.
4. Parent/guardian should be instructed to come into the school with their lice-and nit-free student for a re-admission check.
5. If the re-admission check shows evidence of continued infestation (visible lice or nits), the parent should be instructed to take the student home and complete the removal of all lice and nits and re-treat clothing and household items.
6. When a student is temporarily excluded from school due to head lice infestation, the parent/guardian should be reminded to check everyone in the family and to inform parents/guardians of playmates who may not be students at the school. The parent/guardian should also be advised to check the family for 2 to 3 weeks and then regularly as part of routine home hygiene.

### **SUGGESTED TIMELINE FOR ABSENTEEISM DUE TO HEAD LICE INFESTATION:**

1. Parent/guardian is notified. Student is sent home.
2. After a 2 day absence, the school clerk will notify the school nurse via telephone.
3. The nurse will contact the family. She will notify the school social worker and attendance clerk of the date and time of contact made with the family.
4. If the student continues to be absent, the clerk will notify the school social worker via telephone. The social worker will contact the school nurse to jointly plan the follow-up procedure.

**NOTE:** Parent/guardian **MUST** accompany child for re-entry head check.

### **PREVENTING TRANSMISSION AT SCHOOL:**

1. At the beginning of school, notify parents/guardians of the school policy, reminding them to check their students regularly and requesting that they send their students to school lice/nit free. Parent/guardian should also be encouraged to report cases of lice in their families to the school.
2. Students can be educated by teachers and parent/guardian not to share coats, scarves, hats, helmets, combs, brushes, hair ribbons, head bands, pillows, ear pieces or other personal items. Head-to-head contact should be avoided.
3. Assigned lockers are the preferred storage for outside clothing. If hooks are used for coats, jackets and sweaters, they should be at least 12 inches apart. If crate-type storage bins are used, students should be encouraged to place towels and clothing inside plastic bags before putting into bins.
4. Caps, gloves and scarves should be stored in individual bags marked with the student's name and kept at the individual desk.
5. Allow students to hang their jackets on the backs of their seats.
6. School buses should be monitored to keep personal articles separated.
7. Unlike fleas, lice do not live and breed in the environment. However, it is important to vacuum carpets daily (especially where students take naps on carpet flooring using towels or mats), upholstered surfaces, tumbling mats, etc. for the removal of nits. Vacuuming is always a desirable alternative to spraying. Though they usually feed every 3 to 5 hours, lice are capable of surviving as long as 48 hours without a host. Nits are capable of hatching within 6 to 10 days if the environmental temperature remains constant.

8. In P.E. classes, changes of transmission can be lessened by any of several methods that keep clothing separated:

- Number all clothes hooks and assign a hook to one student for each period.
- Assign lockers to one student for each period.

**Note:** Several students may use the same hook or locker during the day, but the numbers of persons at risk will be narrowed to only those few students. If hooks and lockers were used at random, the whole class would be at risk.

9. Students may be more likely to contract lice if they sit on the floor with other students, if they share a table instead of sitting in an individual desk, and if they share headsets for classroom activities. Headsets should be carefully checked before use and cleaned with alcohol as needed.

10. Students who ride crowded buses and those with long hair may be more susceptible.

11. With public attention currently focused on student safety and the quality of student's health care, the school health program would be incomplete without addressing pediculosis. Because of its highly communicable nature, all students are vulnerable to local outbreaks. The negative effects they suffer range from the discomfort and social stigma of lice to the loss of valuable class time and repeated exposure to potentially toxic pesticidal shampoos and sprays. In turn, families and school communities are victimized by anxiety, frustration, anger and confusion that often accompany pediculosis outbreaks. Our message to parent/guardian must center on the importance of learning how to diagnose and treat head lice properly and on scheduling family head checks as part of routine home hygiene.