

## **Pediculosis (Head Lice) Information**

Head lice are often a subject of concern among parents of school age children. Anyone can get head lice. Lice are “equal opportunity” parasites. They infest all socioeconomic groups, races, genders and ages, but are found more commonly in children due to their close contact with each other. There is NO correlation between cleanliness and getting head lice. A head lice infestation is a mild health condition without serious health consequences for a child, and should not be considered as a major health threat to those infested or those potentially exposed.

Head lice live on the human head and are not carried by animals. Knowing how a louse bug comes in contact with the hair and how to prevent head lice is important in controlling any head lice outbreaks. Head lice cannot be completely eliminated from communities or schools. Neither the occurrence of a case nor an outbreak should be considered as evidence of a breakdown in hygienic practices on the part of individuals, families, or schools. Knowing how to treat head lice is equally important. The following information will be helpful this school year.

**What does head lice look like?** Head lice are small grayish brown bugs that travel slowly through the head laying eggs on individual hair strands. The eggs (nits) are white, about half the size of a grain of rice, and stick very firmly to the hair strand. The eggs hatch in 7-10 days and the newly hatched lice travel through the head laying several eggs daily. The cycle repeats.

**How do you get head lice?** Direct contact with the louse bug or their eggs is necessary for transmission. Head lice do not jump or fly. A child or adult can get head lice from coming in contact with the hair, clothing, upholstered furniture, or any place where there might be loose hairs from an infested person. Movie theaters can be an area for transmission of head lice as well as any activity that allows people to pile hats and coats on top of each other (dance classes, sporting practices, etc). Teach your child not to share hats, headbands, combs, brushes, play wigs, or anything that comes in contact with the head/hair. Scratching the head or complaining of itching of the scalp or neck are symptoms of a possible head lice infestation.

**How do you treat head lice?** Traditional treatments for head lice include nit picking with a fine-toothed comb, over the counter and prescription products and home remedies. Nit picking takes time and patience, while many products contain a pesticide that can be neurotoxic when used inappropriately. These products are safe and effective but like all medical treatments they must be used as directed and with caution by parents. Package directions for all the treatments should be followed carefully. After completing the shampoo, all eggs (nits) must be removed. This is best done by using your fingernails or by using a fine-toothed comb such as the Licemeister comb (available at <http://www.headlice.org/licemeister/index.htm>). Dispose of eggs (nits) in trashcan. Fine-toothed comb should be used every day for 3 weeks. Bedding and clothing must be washed in hot water and dried. Vacuum upholstered furniture, carpets, floors and cars. Combs and brushes should be disinfected. Stuffed animals and clothing that cannot be washed should be put in a sealed bag for 2 weeks.

**What do I do if my child has head lice?** The most effective point of control of head lice is the household. Parents are best suited to screen their children for head lice and to properly treat and control lice within the household. Please inform the school office if you discover head lice in your child's hair. Your child can return to school after treatment and examination. If your child, upon examination by school-designated personnel, does not have any live lice or nits/eggs (that are closer than ¼ from the scalp), he/she may return to the classroom. Please have your child report to the school office to be checked if your child has been treated for lice. If you have any questions or have difficulty with head lice treatment, please contact the school nurse through the school office.

More information about head lice is available at:

[www.headlice.org](http://www.headlice.org)

[www.nasn.org](http://www.nasn.org) (see Head Lice (Pediculosis))

[http://www.michigan.gov/documents/Final\\_Michigan\\_Head\\_Lice\\_Manual\\_106828\\_7.pdf](http://www.michigan.gov/documents/Final_Michigan_Head_Lice_Manual_106828_7.pdf).

<http://www.cdc.gov/parasites/lice/>