



## HEAD LICE

With each new school year, the potential of head lice exists, introducing itself to your children and family. If your child brings home unwanted guests, such as head lice, there are certain steps to take to contain and eliminate the outbreak. Lice infestations are very common, ranging from 8-12 million cases per year. The detection of head lice is nothing to be embarrassed about or ashamed of. It does not imply that you have poor hygiene. In fact, lice prefer clean hair so that the eggs may better stick to the hair shafts. Lice can affect people from all race and socio-economic backgrounds so everyone is at risk.

Head lice are tiny parasitic insects that live and feed on the human scalp. While lice DO NOT carry disease, they are contagious through direct head-to-head contact. New eggs hatch approximately every 10 to 14 days and can live for an additional 30 days after hatching if not removed from the scalp and hair strands. Each female louse may lay 10 eggs per day or as many as 400 in her lifetime.

The National Pediculosis Foundation (NPF) suggests a 4-step method in dealing with head lice: Screening, Detection, Removal, & Prevention. Below is a summary:

1. **Screening:** Itching is the most common symptom. If you notice your child scratching their head intensely & repeatedly, it is a good idea to check the scalp to investigate the cause of the itch. For best visualization, work under a good light, such as a bright lamp or direct outdoor sunlight. Use a comb or a pencil to separate and lift the hair from the scalp in small sections, Start at the hair shaft (root end of the hair) to the end of the hair strand. Live lice will be found crawling on the scalp, while the eggs (“nits”) are generally found on hair shafts about 1/8” above the scalp. Pay special attention to areas around the ears & nape of neck.
2. **Detection:** Lice are about the size of a sesame seed and are reddish brown to grayish-brown wingless insects. They cannot fly or jump. Lice eggs are white, yellow, brown, or tan, always oval shaped, are about the size of a poppy seed, and are always glued at an angle to the side of the hair shaft, making them difficult to remove. It is easy to confuse nits with other hair debris, such as dandruff. Dandruff will be white, may wrap around or stick to the hair shaft, but is easily dislodged. If lice &/or nits are detected in one family member, check ALL family members for the presence of lice or nits, but ONLY those infested should be treated. If it is detected, please contact the school nurse, school health tech, or principal. You may also want to give a courtesy call to anyone who your child had recent close contact with, such as a sleepover at a friend’s house or contact the coach if your child is a member of a sports team, such as baseball/football, where sharing of head gear may have taken place.
3. **Removal:**

- a. **Individual treatment:** Remember that all lice-killing products are pesticides. There are many over-the counter treatment products that are available. Consult your physician or pharmacist before applying or using lice treatment pesticides when a person involved is pregnant, nursing, has allergies, asthma, epilepsy, has pre-existing medical conditions; or has lice or nits in the eyebrows or eyelashes. Never use a pesticide on or near the eyes. If you choose to use an over-the-counter treatment, **follow all directions carefully and completely.** Use the product over the sink, not in the tub or shower to prevent potential infestation to other parts of the body. After using the treatment, ALL eggs (nits) MUST be removed, or you have not seen the last of the lice infestation. Remember, the eggs will hatch in 10-14 days. To remove the eggs, comb small sections of hair from root to tip with a very fine tooth comb (usually included in the treatment kit). But even under the best of conditions, a few may be missed, so it is recommended to re-check all family members and re-treat the person who had lice every 7-10 days.
  - b. **Household items:** Wash bedding, pillows, towels, & recently worn clothing in hot water and dry in a very hot dryer. Vacuuming is the safest and the best way to remove lice &/or fallen hairs with nits attached from furniture, rugs, car seats, mattresses, etc. Do this daily for several days. Lice Sprays are not recommended. Items, such as non-washable pillows & stuffed animals should be placed in a tightly sealed garbage bag for at least 2 weeks. Soak combs, brushes, & hair accessories in very hot (not boiling) bleach water for 10-15 minutes.
  - c. **“Home-Made Remedy:”** This recipe, authored by Dr. Moshe Ipp, has gained the support of many school nurses. It is completely safe and does not contain toxic chemicals. Use 50/50 solution of mineral oil and vinegar. Massage the mixture into the hair & scalp, cover with a shower cap or small plastic bag, and leave on for 1 hour. Then shampoo with your regular shampoo and comb hair as described above. The vinegar helps to detach the nits from the hair shaft & the mineral oil suffocates the live lice and makes combing easier.
4. **Prevention:** Remind your child NOT to share any item that could directly transfer lice and/or nits from one person’s scalp to another: brushes, combs, hair barrettes, headbands, hats, scarves, jackets, shirts, headphones, towels, sports equipment worn on the head (football & baseball helmets). Frequent hand washing is a good idea, too.

Utilizing this 4 step approach will help to prevent &/or eradicate head lice. If live lice are detected on your child’s scalp, you will notified to come pick your child up from school and further recommendations of above will be given, You will be encouraged to treat your child the same day. If no lice are found your child may return the next morning to school after being checked by the School Nurse or School Health Tech. If you have further questions, feel free to contact your school.

**Sources:**

National Pediculosis Association  
Selekman, Janice, (Ed). (2006). *School Nursing: A Comprehensive Text*. Philadelphia: F.A Davis  
[www.headlice.org](http://www.headlice.org)  
[www.ridlice.com](http://www.ridlice.com)  
[www.liceMD.com](http://www.liceMD.com)  
[www.nixlice.com](http://www.nixlice.com)