

Head Lice Facts

- Head lice are small insects that can live on the scalp and neck of a human host. They do not live on animals. They need the human host to survive and will not live for any length of time off of the scalp.
- They hatch from small eggs (nits) that are attached with a cement-like substance to the shaft of individual hairs.
- They must have the warmth of the human body and blood on the scalp to survive.
- They are NOT a health hazard, a sign of uncleanliness nor do they spread disease.
- They do not fly or jump. They want to STAY on the hair near the scalp.
- They need very close head-to-head contact to spread from one person to another. Homes and camps are the most common mode of transmission.
- Indirect transmission is uncommon but may occur via shared combs, brushes, hats and hair accessories that have been in contact with lice. RARELY are they spread through shared helmets or headsets.

- Itching occurs when they inject a bit of saliva into the scalp, but itching can persist even after treatment and is not a reliable sign of lice.
- Due to the life cycle of the louse, when lice are discovered, they have usually been there about a month. Checking the scalp within a few days of exposure will more than likely NOT result in finding any evidence of lice.
- An infected individual may complain of itching as well as a tickling sensation of something moving in the hair.

Lice is not a public health issue – they do not carry disease nor have any negative implications about the child or family who has been infected. Removing the stigma and having an understanding of the issue, and passing this understanding to our children should be the first step in addressing lice. Below are several resources where you can get more accurate and scientific information: identify.us.com – Identify US – formerly Harvard School of Public Health information on lice <http://www.cdc.gov> – The Centers for Disease Control

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Lice

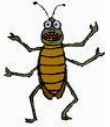


YUCK!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

This is the general reaction by most people when the topic of lice is raised. In reality, while lice is not something that we want to have to deal with, the biggest issue is that it is difficult to effectively treat and eradicate it without vigilance and patience.



Diagnosis and Treatment



The gold standard of diagnosis for head lice is the presence of a live bug.



Live louse are difficult to see as they are tiny and crawl rapidly.



Nits are the egg casings and can resemble such things as hair casts, residue from hair products or dandruff. However, nits are cemented to the hair shaft and are difficult to remove.



Scientific evidence has shown that nits further than approximately 6 mm from the scalp are probably not viable.



Nits may remain on the hair well after the infestation and vigilant rechecking of the head may be warranted to determine that there is not a viable case of lice.

The Issues and the Evidence

- Previously school policies and best practices have been based on misinformation, myths and stigmas regarding lice. Today many of these policies and practices are based on research being released by reputable organizations such as The American Academy of Pediatrics, The Center for Disease Control, and the National Association of School Nurses that address the issues of treatment of lice, school absences, and embarrassment and confidentiality issues that have created undue anxiety among parents and school staff in the past. These organizations support abandoning “no-nit” policies and mass screenings, as they have not had a significant effect on the incidence of head lice in the school setting.
- Based on the life cycle of lice, a child identified as having lice has been infected for 3-4 weeks already and pose very little risk of transmission to others.
- ♦ There exist many treatment op-

tions, however none are 100% effective. You may want to contact your pediatrician to discuss your choices.

- ♦ Removal of nits can be helpful in decreasing the risk of self-reinfestation (especially the nits close to the scalp), diagnostic confusion or the possibility of unnecessary re-treatment.
- ♦ Basic vacuuming of your home and car seats, and cleaning of your child’s linens and any objects in contact with their head are recommended to avoid re-infection. Lice cannot survive more than 24 hours off of a human scalp.



School nurses are available to provide accurate information and work with parents and school staff to minimize the uproar that can occur when a child is identified as having lice. Our goal is to maintain a child’s privacy, minimize the loss of classroom time and educate the public on lice issues. Your school nurse can instruct you on how to check your child’s head and answer any questions or give advice in the event that your child has lice.