

## HEAD LICE (PEDICULOSIS) PARENT INFORMATION

The American Association of Pediatrics, The National Association of School Nurses and The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, recommends that students with head lice may attend school while undergoing treatment for the nits. No disease is associated with head lice and in-school transmission is considered to be rare.

About 10 million Americans get head lice each year. Anyone can get head lice. Many individuals have the impression that only persons who are unclean get head lice. This is not true. Lice are a common problem effecting children of every social status in every part of the country. Head lice can affect any person regardless of race or gender. They are found all over the country but they are the biggest problem in warm climates.

### WHAT ARE HEAD LICE?

Head lice are very small, flat, wingless insects with three pairs of legs, each having delicate hooks. These hooks help the louse move about the scalp or hair shaft. This keeps them from being brushed or washed out. **Lice cannot jump, leap, or fly! They do move very rapidly on the scalp, hair or skin (approximately nine inches per minute).**

The lice eggs (called nits) are teardrop shaped and are the size of a typewritten comma (1 mm long) and vary in color from yellowish-brown to silvery white. **Nits are attached to the hair strand with a stubborn, waterproof cement-like substance and cannot be easily removed.**

**The average number of lice on a head is 10-15 and the incubation period for eggs to hatch is 7-10 days. These hatched eggs will be mature to lay eggs in 10 days.** One female louse can live up to 30 days on a host and 24 hours off a host and produce 275 to 300 eggs. Lice cannot live at temperatures below 72° F. or above 125° F.

### HOW ARE HEAD LICE TRANSMITTED?

Head lice are transmitted most often by sharing **combs, brushes or other grooming aids and hair accessories i.e. headbands and scrunches.** They can also be transmitted by sharing **hats, caps, wigs, pillows, bedding or coats,** or by the co-mingling of these items at home, at school, at day care centers or other public places. A louse must travel from the scalp of an individual with head lice to the scalp of another. While this may occur with minimal head to head contact, such as in playing, it is more common with prolonged contact as might occur when sleeping together in the same bed. It is possible that an individual with head lice can transfer lice on inanimate objects such as brushes, combs, pillows and/or hats if a person shared objects soon after use. Head lice cannot survive long without a human host. **Within 24 hours they will dehydrate and die.**

### WHAT ARE THE SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF HEAD LICE?

The signs and symptoms of head lice are: **persistent itching behind the ears and at the nape of the neck, restlessness or poor attention span and in severe cases, swollen lymph glands in the neck and under the arms.** As many as **50%** of the students with head lice can be without symptoms; that is why one should never assume because there is no itching there are no head lice or nits.

### HOW DO YOU INSPECT A HEAD FOR LICE?

In order to see the nits and head lice, use gloved hands and applicators to part the hair carefully, beginning at the back of the neck and the area around the ears. Applicators can be popsicle sticks, tongue depressors or coffee stirrers. **(Do not use ungloved hands for inspection because they can become a source of transmission).** Discard gloves and applicators after each use in trash receptacle. **Wash hands with soap and water, alcohol hand rinse or alcohol wipes and apply new gloves between inspections.** If nits are not found around the ears and at the nape of the neck, continue to inspect the rest of the hair. In order to avoid mistaking dandruff or hair spray for nits, attempt to pull the particle from the hair shaft. **If it remains attached, you have reason to suspect nits.**

Lice move very rapidly through the hair and are not easy to see. Nits, the lice eggs, are easier to see and are most commonly found at the back of the neck and above and behind the ears. A magnifying lamp may be used for proper inspection of nits and head lice.

#### TREATMENT FOR HEAD LICE

It is necessary to treat the individual with head lice and his/her personal articles such as caps, combs, brushes, hair accessories, towels and bedding. **Since the highest potential for spreading is among family members, special attention should be given to making sure that family members are examined and also treated, if necessary.** Cutting or shaving the hair of the person with head lice is unnecessary. **Simple vacuuming currently is the most effective environmental control measure.** The U.S. Public Health Service no longer recommends fumigating or using insecticides in the home, school or school buses.

A person identified, as having head lice will need to have the lice and nits manually removed. While manually removing lice and nits is the safest method, if desired an over the counter lice product can be used. When using any of these products, be sure to carefully follow the manufacturer's directions on the package.

#### HELPFUL HINTS:

1. Use a solution of half water and half vinegar on the hair. Wrap the head in a towel and keep the towel on the head for twenty minutes. This will help loose the nits for easier removal.
2. Keep the hair moist while combing out nits.
3. Part the hair into approximately 5-6 small sections. Start at the head and work downward. Remove the nits from each section using a fine-tooth comb, nit comb, nylon net or toothbrush, combing from the base of the hair shaft outward. If this does not remove all the nits, you must pick them out of the hair with your fingers.
4. Place the nits on a paper towel and dispose in garbage can.
5. Remove all lice and nits. You must pick out the hair with fingers if comb does not remove them.
6. Have your child put on clean clothing after the treatment.
7. Wash discarded clothes in hot soapy water.
8. **Since the highest potential for spreading is among family members, special attention should be given to making sure family members are examined and also treated, if necessary. Inspect all family members daily for at least two weeks. Use the same treatment for other family members who have head lice.**

#### TREATMENT OF PERSONAL ARTICLES AND HOME ENVIRONMENT

1. Remove all bedding and wash sheets, pillowcase, blankets, towels, clothing, underwear and nightclothes in **hot soapy water**. Change bedding frequently. Machine-wash all washable clothing and bed linens that have come in contact with the person with head lice.
2. Clean all combs, brushes, hair accessories and similar items in hot soapy water.
3. Simple vacuuming is currently the most effective way to clean the home environment. The U.S. Public Health Service no longer recommends fumigating or using insecticides in the home, school or school buses.
4. Notify the school, day care center or other places that your child attends or frequents. This will allow them to take preventive measures so that your child will not get head lice again.

#### PARENT'S RESPONSIBILITY WHILE THE STUDENT IS ATTENDING SCHOOL

1. Parents are expected to provide appropriate treatment for head lice and continue to remove nits from their child's scalp until nit free. Successful treatment should result in your child being free of nits.
2. Parents/Guardians should monitor by checking their child's hair regularly for nits.
3. **Students with ongoing head lice and live nits will be referred to the local Florida Department of Health and may be excluded.**