

## Head Lice

### **What are Head Lice?**

Head lice (*Pediculus humanus capitis*) are parasitic insects found on human hair (head, eyebrows, and eyelashes). Head lice live on the hair shaft very close to the skin (usually scalp) surface so that they can feed on human blood. **Head lice do not cause or spread disease but may be stressful and costly to individuals and families.** Poor hygiene is also not a cause for head lice. Lice is common worldwide in preschool and school-age children. **Head lice are not a health hazard; they are a nuisance.**

### **How are Lice spread?**

Head Lice move by crawling; they are unable to fly or hop. They spread from person to person by **direct contact (head-to-head exposure)**. Cleaning the environment of a person diagnosed with head lice, is encouraged, but it is much less common for spread to occur through objects (hairbrushes, clothing, towels, etc.). Transmission may occur wherever children congregate such as at home (siblings), school, camp, birthday parties, sleepovers, sports, and after-school care. Taking “selfies” has become another way lice are spread.

### **What are symptoms and how are Head Lice detected?**

Head lice bite the skin (like mosquitos), and their saliva causes the most obvious symptom- **itching (especially at night)**. Sometimes the scratching may cause scalp redness and irritation. In a first case of lice, an individual may not have itching for 4-6 weeks. Head lice may not be easy to see. But they lay eggs (nits) on the hair shaft after about 8-9 days that are much easier to detect. These nits may have a whitish-clear, dandruff-like appearance and are stuck to the hair shaft with a sticky substance produced by the lice. Lice are a grayish-white, tiny, light-avoiding, fast-moving bug that is seen very close to or on the head. Good lighting, separating the hair in sections, using a magnifying glass and lice comb may help in finding head lice. Head lice can only live 1 day off the host (head or skin) but may live for about 30 days on the host.

### **How are Head Lice treated?**

Consult with your child’s health care provider or local pharmacist for treatment options. **There are prescription and over-the-counter medications available at many stores and pharmacies.** Most of these treatments kill only the live lice; they do not kill the eggs (nits). It is of utmost importance that the treatment (and possibly re-treatment) instructions are followed. Reading the product’s label and following the directions listed is a must. Once the treatment is done, the nits should be removed manually or with a lice comb by the parent or guardian daily at home until none are seen.



**Magnified view of Head Lice**



**Nits (Lice eggs)**

### **Classroom Control Measures**

- Hand washing and cleaning under the nails should be encouraged.
- All hats, coats, etc. should be stored apart and not touching. Students should not share each other's clothing.
- Students should not share hairbrushes, combs, or other personal items.
- Activities should not be planned that allow heads to touch (ex. story time lying down).
- Pillows and blankets should not be shared.
- In classes that dress-up clothes may be utilized, faculty should wash according to guidelines and put away until all signs of infestation are gone.
- Gym equipment, mats, carpeting, headsets, and other commonly used items should be cleaned thoroughly.
- **Treating the classroom environment with a pesticide is not considered effective or necessary.**

### **CCSD Head Lice Procedure**

- When a faculty member suspects a student of having lice, the student will be referred to the school nurse.
- The school nurse will assess the student for the presence of lice and/or nits. If the school nurse has difficulty identifying the presence of lice, she will notify the consulting nurse to assist in further evaluation.
- If a student is found to have **live lice**, he/she will be sent home with a lice education letter for his/her parents. It is not recommended that his/her class of students is checked by the nurse for the presence of lice unless the faculty notes symptoms in these students.
- If the student has **live lice**, the school nurse will check his/her siblings and infested ones sent home. If siblings attend another school, that school nurse will be notified to check the siblings.

- Proof of treatment (store receipt/box top from medication) may be required on return to school. **The student will also be re-examined by the nurse for live lice.** In addition, students will be rechecked for the presence of head lice after 10 days. Parents must remove nits (eggs) from the child's hair.
- After 3 consecutive live infestations, the school nurse will notify the area consulting nurse and administrator. The consulting nurse will contact parent for conference/discussion exploring what steps were taken to treat the head lice. The consulting nurse will then assess the need for further education and contact the school social worker if necessary.
- The school social worker will be notified if the student has extended absences due to head lice or for chronic cases of head lice.

### **Additional Information**

- There are many over the counter anti-lice agents available at many different stores.
- The directions must be followed for the agent to be effective. Many agents require retreatment in 7-10 days.
- There are alternative treatments available. Please consult your child's health care provider or a pharmacist for more information.
- All persons in the child's household and his/her close contacts should be examined and treated if necessary.
- Most anti-lice agents only kill the live lice. The nits must be removed by the parent or guardian at home manually or with a lice comb.
- Personal items may be washed and dried (in the hottest setting of the dryer). If unable to be washed, the items should be bagged for 10 days.
- The mattress, car, furniture, and carpeting should be vacuumed.
- All clothing and bed linens must be washed and dried (in the hottest setting of the dryer) at the time the student is treated for live lice.
- Combs and brushes may be soaked in hot water for 10 minutes.

**The school nurse will serve as a resource for the school and parent.**

### **References**

1. <https://www.cdc.gov/parasites/lice/head>, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Web.
2. [Head Lice | Pediatrics | American Academy of Pediatrics \(aap.org\)](#), American Academy of Pediatrics, Web.
3. [Head Lice - National Association of School Nurses \(nasn.org\)](#), National Association of School Nurses, Web.