

Head Lice

A Real Head Scratcher for Parents



Dear Parent or Guardian:

As your child's school nurse, I want to welcome your child back to school for what promises to be a productive and exciting new school year. I also want to make you aware of a "pesky" situation that impacts schools around the country, often as the school year begins.

Pediculosis, or head lice, is a condition that each year affects approximately 6 to 12 million children between the ages of 3 and 12 years of age, and about 1 in every 100 elementary school children. Head lice are parasites that are generally found on the scalp, around the ears, and at the back of the neck. The adult louse is about the size of a sesame seed, and can be the color of your child's hair. Eggs, or nits, are smaller and silver in color.

Head lice are not a sign of poor hygiene and they do not transmit disease. Spread from one child to another can occur during direct head to head contact or by sharing of personal items such as combs, brushes, caps or helmets.

The most common symptom of head lice is itching and head scratching, particularly at night. Red bite marks or sores may also be noticed on the scalp. If you suspect that your child has head lice, he or she should be examined by your health care provider. Safe and effective products to treat head lice are available both over the counter and by doctor's prescription. It is important to follow the directions carefully. In addition, use a fine-tooth comb or special nit comb to help remove the eggs (nits) from the hair. You can also check your child's scalp weekly when the hair is wet to see if there are any new head lice. Parents should also wash in hot water or dry-clean all recently worn clothing, hats, used bedding, and towels. Personal care items such as combs, brushes and hair clips should also be washed in hot water. Toys, such as stuffed animals, can be put into a tightly closed plastic bag for 14 days or placed in a hot dryer for 30 minutes to kill the lice.

My goal as school nurse is to provide you with the information you need to safeguard your child's health, and ensure that his or her education is not disrupted, but remains the most positive experience possible. I hope you find this information useful, and I send best wishes to your child for a rewarding school year.

For a healthy school,

School Nurse