

## **Frequently Asked Questions Regarding Lice**

Head lice are a very common problem, second only to the common cold among communicable diseases affecting schoolchildren. The best way to reduce head lice infestations is to be well informed with the facts.

Lice are small wingless bugs that live and breed on the human head. They thrive by biting their host, similar to the mosquito. Lice do not spread disease. There are between 6-12 million cases of lice each year, in the U.S. (similar to the number of cases of the common cold). Lice will live on anyone's head; clean hair, dirty hair...they just like hair (enough hair to hide and thrive, not likely to live on a head with a crew-cut). Lice do not fly or jump (thank goodness). They are most often transferred to another head by shared brushes, hats or head to head contact. Lice therefore tend to spread to best friends, siblings and not typically to a casual contact. Lice have no motivation to leave the head that they are on, they are essentially accidentally transferred to another head. If a louse falls off someone's head, it can only live for 24-48 hours. Therefore, **you need not worry that your house, or your school "has lice"(they simply do not survive off the human head)**. Lice will not live or breed on your pets, in carpet, bedding or stuffed animals. A female louse lays up to six eggs a day, so even though many lice are lost during daily bathing, the cycle continues because of the eggs that remain. Head lice typically thrive for several weeks on someone's head, before they are discovered.

### **What is the school's procedure when a student has lice?**

In the past, kids with head lice were kept home from school, but now doctors (and the American Academy of Pediatrics) no longer recommend these "no-nit" policies. If a student is found to have live lice or nits while at school, a call is made to the parent to get treatment and return to school the next day.

### **What is my responsibility as a parent?**

If your child complains that their head is itchy, you should check for lice. It is not always obvious that a child has head lice. It is uncommon to see a live louse when checking their head. What you need to look for is the eggs, or nits. You need to part the hair every ¼" and look near the scalp for tiny teardrop shaped eggs that are attached to one piece of hair. If you knock this egg with your finger, it will not move. It is glued to one piece of hair and you need to pull it off with your thumbnail. Another sign to look for are small red bite marks, often near the nape of the neck, or near the ears.

If your child has lice, contact your pediatrician or pharmacist for a lice treatment recommendation. Please notify the school. Most lice treatments kill live lice, but you must pick out all the nits. Picking the nits is a very time consuming process!!! You must attempt to remove all the nits, or soon you will have live lice again.

Finally, nobody asks to get lice. As a parent, patience and support to families experiencing a lice event can go a long way to reducing the associated stigma and will set a positive example for your children on how to behave toward their peers. Asking teachers and the nurse for the names of students who have lice is inappropriate and uncomfortable.

### **Resources**

<http://kidshealth.org/en/parents/head-lice.html>

<http://www.thenitpickers.com/>

<http://www.licedoctors.com/illinois/chicago-lice-treatment-service.html>