

Head Nits and Lice Brief

Head lice are the cause of much embarrassment, misunderstanding and unnecessary days lost from school and work. The American Academy of Pediatrics and other health and medical organizations maintain that head lice are not a health hazard, a sign of uncleanness, or responsible for the spread of any disease. The following statement attempts to clarify pediculosis (nits and head lice) management within the school environment. The Tredyffrin/Easttown School District Certified School Nurses (CSN) reviewed the District's head lice practice in the spring of 2010 in light of current research and clinical reports published by American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), the Pennsylvania Department of Health (PaDoH) and the Center for Disease Control (CDC). Based on research-based recommendations, the school district has updated its guidelines for managing nits and lice within the school setting.

Key Points:

- The management of nits and head lice should not disrupt the educational process.
- A student will not be excluded from school for nits unless nits are within ¼" of the scalp.
- A student with lice will be sent home for treatment. A student may return to school as soon as possible after being cleared by the school nurse if s/he has no live lice.
- Any student who was most likely to have had direct head-to-head contact with a student with live lice will be screened.
- A letter will be sent home to parents when live lice are found in their child's classroom.
- The school nurse's goals are to minimize school absenteeism, contain infestations, and provide appropriate health information for treatment and prevention.

Please refer to the following frequently asked questions and references for additional information. Parents are also strongly encouraged to contact their school's nurse for additional information.

Lice:

Do head lice jump, hop or fly?

No. Head lice are wingless and do not have hind legs. However, with their six legs, each with a claw, they can cling well to hair and crawl very fast. They cannot jump, hop or fly. They are obligate human parasites; their goal is to stay on the head where they presently live.

Should sprays be used in the house or school to kill head lice?

No. Sprays can be toxic. They are not safe for humans or the environment. Sprays can also be a trigger for children with breathing conditions such as asthma. Vacuuming is the best way to rid furniture and carpeting of head lice.

How long can head lice survive off a human?

Head lice must have a blood meal within a 24-hour period and a surrounding temperature in the high 80s to survive. They will die without a human host.

Do head lice spread diseases?

No. Head lice do not carry any disease. They are just pests that can cause stress because they can be difficult to get rid of in a home.

Who gets head lice?

Most people now recognize that lice can happen to anyone and do not pose an emergency situation. They are seen more frequently in children ages 3-12 because this age group has more

head-to-head contact. Personal hygiene or cleanliness in the home or school has nothing to do with who gets head lice. Parents are encouraged to check their children's heads for lice regularly and if the child is symptomatic.

What are the signs and symptoms of head lice?

One sign may be a tickling feeling of something moving in the hair. Itching is caused by a local allergic reaction to the bites, and sores on the head may result from scratching.

Do pets carry head lice?

No.

Will students be excluded for head lice?

- Students with lice will be sent home for treatment.
- Students with lice will be checked by the school nurse before returning to school.
- Students with an infestation of nits should receive appropriate treatment at home as soon as possible.
- Because no disease process is associated with head lice, schools are not advised to exclude students when nits remain after appropriate lice treatment.

What happens when a child is found to have lice?

Studies by the AAP and CDC indicate that screening for live lice has not been proven to have a significant effect on the incidence of head lice in a school community. However, individual students who were most likely to have had direct head-to-head contact with the student with live lice will be checked. A child found with live head lice will be referred to his/her parent(s)/guardian(s) for treatment. The classroom rugs in that child's classroom will be thoroughly vacuumed. A letter will be sent to parents/guardians in the index child's classroom.

Nits:

When are nits a risk factor for hatching?

Eggs by themselves without the presence of live lice do not indicate an active infestation. Studies by the AAP and the PaDoH found that having 5 or more nits within 1/4" inch of the scalp is a risk factor for nits hatching into live lice. If nits are found more than 1/4" from the scalp and no live lice are found, the infestation is probably an old one and does not need to be treated. These nits usually are dead or empty and will not hatch but will instead fall off the head. Nits themselves are not contagious. According to the medical experts, the real problem is the lice, not their eggs.

What happens when a child is found to have nits?

It is recommended that students having 5 or more nits within 1/4" of the scalp be treated as soon as possible. Studies by the AAP and CDC indicate that widespread screening for nits is not an accurate way for predicting which children will become infested, and screening for live lice has not been proven to have a significant effect on the incidence of head lice in a school community.

Will students be excluded for head lice?

- No. However, a student with nits should receive appropriate attention at home.

Resources:

<http://aappolicy.aappublications.org/cgi/reprint/pediatrics;110/3/638.pdf>

<http://www.cdc.gov/lice/head/>

<http://www.portal.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt/community/schools/14130>