

Notes from the Nurse



Head lice: Sharing; Not always a good thing!

Children like to share but sharing is not always a good thing! Head lice are an ongoing problem in school age children. For this reason I thought it would be a good time to review a few facts about head lice:

- Head lice are wingless insects about 1/8 to 1/4 inch long, or about the size of a sesame seed.
- They cannot hop, fly, or jump.
- Head lice must have human blood in order to survive and cannot thrive on pets.
- They live about 30 days on a human and will starve to death in 2-3 days if not on a human.
- Nits (louse eggs) are yellowish white to tan, smooth, oval shaped structures smaller than sesame seeds and are attached at an angle to the side of the hair shaft. They can usually be found behind the ears or at the neckline where it is warm and dark. The discovery of nits always confirms infestation with head lice.
- Lice are spread by personal contact or by touching any surface or item that has been in contact with an infested person, including bedding, hats, combs, sports helmets etc.
- Symptoms: The first symptom of head lice is persistent itching or scratching at the back of the head or around the ears. Repeated scratching of his/her head may be a sign that the child has head lice. It is also very common for other members of the household to become infested with head lice. Screen all family members and treat **only** if lice or nits are found. Contact the school nurse if you would like her to screen your child (or other family member) for head lice.
- Detection: If your child is observed repeatedly scratching his/her head, check the hair shafts and scalp closely for head lice or their nits (eggs). It is important to check for head lice in good daylight and with a magnifying glass, if needed. **If your child has head lice contact the school nurse so she can screen the rest of your child's class for other cases. Make arrangements to have your child screened by the school nurse **before** returning to school.
- Treatment: Permethrin based medications (such as Nix) are the treatment of choice and may be purchased over the counter. Follow package directions closely. Some lice and nits can still be alive when treatment is finished, **it is extremely important to remove ALL of the lice and nits from the hair.**



- Treating the environment: Spraying classrooms or homes with insecticides is **not** recommended. Vacuum floors, rugs, pillows, and upholstered furniture. Wash hats, scarves, clothing, towels, and bed linen in hot water and dry using high heat for at least 20 minutes. Dry clean or tie up non-washable items in a plastic bag for 2 weeks. Soak combs and brushes for 1 hour in rubbing alcohol (or another disinfectant), or wash with soap and hot water (130 degrees F)

Lice are not a health hazard, they do not spread diseases, and their presence is not a sign of un-cleanliness. It is not a disgrace to get head lice because they are not selective who they infest – they can be acquired by anyone. So, if you find that a louse has chosen your family to visit this school year follow the advice given above and most of all be patient and keep your sense of humor. For more information you can visit www.headlice.org .

Doris Eller R.N. BSN