

Information about Head Lice

While we all are looking forward to spring, the warmer weather does contribute to the emergence of lice among children.

It is the position of the National Association of School Nurses that the management of pediculosis (infestation by head lice) should not disrupt the educational process. No disease is associated with head lice, and in-school transmission is considered to be rare. When transmission occurs, it is generally found among younger-age children with increased head-to-head contact (Frankowski & Boccioni, 2010).

Some Facts about Lice...

1. Until a few years ago, approaches to head lice were based on old wives tales, misconceptions and marketing departments for the companies who made products for profit from Head Lice Hysteria. Luckily, we now have research upon which to base our practice. Thank you, Harvard!
2. Head lice are not a sign of uncleanliness; they love clean hair because it is easier to latch on.
3. Lice do not hop, jump or fly; the only way they can get from one person to another is direct touching, head-to-head.
4. Lice are not passed on pets. The only place head lice can survive and thrive is on the human head.
5. When found, most cases of head lice are already more than a month old. One sign is a red itchy rash on the back of the neck, just below the hair line.
6. Because of use and overuse of head lice shampoos, head lice have become resistant to the products that once would kill them, so no head lice product is 100 % effective, even if you follow the directions to the letter. That is why combing and nit removal is important.
7. Never treat or retreat "just in case" in the absence of live lice. Head lice products are pesticides, which are toxic if overused and can be absorbed through the skin. Follow the directions carefully.
8. Removing the nits (eggs) and live lice with a special metal-tooth comb is time-consuming but the most effective way to get rid of them. They do not wash out.
9. Head lice are not a source of infection or disease; they are simply a nuisance.
10. Schools are not the most common places where head lice are spread, even though schools have been blamed in the past. Sleep-overs among friends and relatives are thought to be a common way they are passed home to home.
11. School-wide head checks are not recommended or endorsed by the Harvard School of Public Health, the American Academy of Pediatrics or the Centers for Disease Control. The most effective screening occurs when parents check their own children at home, treat if any are found, and make efforts to remove the nits.
12. One of the biggest challenges in eliminating head lice is parents' discomfort in communicating about the problem with other parents when they find head lice, so they are more easily passed back and forth among close friends and relatives.
13. Most schools want children with head lice treated and back in school right away.
14. School nurses will assist you in checking or rechecking as you work to remove nits and lice from your child's head. Just ask.
15. School nurses will not judge you or report you or tell others if you ask for assistance dealing with head lice. We handle lice in a confidential manner. We know that even the best families can catch them, and most of us who are parents have been through it at least once ourselves.

Please call if you have any questions or need further guidance with treatment.

Anne Shaw, RN

See the research:

American Academy of Pediatrics

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

Harvard School of Public Health

<http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/headlice.html>

Centers for Disease Control

http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dpd/parasites/headlice/factsheet_headlice_treating.htm