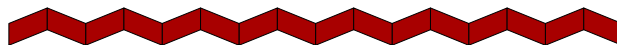




HEAD LICE



Safety & Security Fact Sheet

✓ **WHAT ARE HEAD LICE?**

Head lice are tiny, wingless insects that are particularly adapted to live and breed in human hair near the scalp. They bite like mosquitoes, causing itching and the telltale symptom of frequent head scratching. The insect is not known to transmit infectious organisms but secondary infections may occur as a result of the scratching. Head lice are a nuisance, not a health hazard.

✓ **HOW ARE THEY DETECTED?**

The egg cases or nits are easier to see than the lice themselves. The nits are whitish ovals usually attached to the hair shaft within a quarter inch of the scalp especially behind the ears and around the back of the neck. The nits cannot be easily combed or brushed away. A magnifying glass and a disposable examination stick will aid in detection.

✓ **HOW DOES A HEAD LICE INFESTATION SPREAD?**

Head lice spread by crawling from person to person primarily through direct head to head contact. The lice prefer the warmth of the human scalp and the shelter of the hair shafts. They are not likely to leave the comfort of a human head except for the comfort of another human head. Stray lice that fall off a head are either injured or dying and incapable of causing a new infestation. Nits on shed hair are not likely to hatch because they become too cold to survive. Transmission may occur among siblings and playmates wherever children congregate, during birthday parties, sleepovers, and after-school childcare.

✓ **CAN TRANSMISSION OCCUR THROUGH CONTACT WITH OBJECTS?**

Indirect transfer is thought to be possible through contact with shared, lice-carrying objects, particularly combs, brushes and hair apparel, or objects that may be held closely to the head such as pillows, and plush toys. Carpets, furniture, and pets are not generally considered to be sources of infestation.

✓ **WHAT MUST BE DONE TO CONTROL HEAD LICE IN A SCHOOL?**

Always seek assistance from the clinic room aide or public health nurse who may recommend exclusion of the infected children, until adequate medical treatment is confirmed. Upon the advice of the health department, the principal may notify parents by letter (see FCPS publication *School Health Risks*) and distribute additional information provided by the health department. It cannot be overstated that head lice are considered a student health nuisance and that the focus of attention must be on the safe and effective treatment of the child and implementation of effective control measures in their home. Parents should ask their family physician or the health department for advice.

✓ **CAN A SCHOOL BE THE SOURCE OF REINFESTATION OF A TREATED CHILD?**

Since direct transmission from child to child may occur wherever children congregate, reinfestation of a treated child could possibly occur if a child with an active case of head lice is present. All potential sources of reinfestation ought to be identified. When children in an affected school are being examined and treated in accordance with health department recommendations, reinfestation of a treated child is not likely to occur.



✓ **WHAT SHOULD A TEACHER DO TO CONTROL HEAD LICE IN THE CLASSROOM?**

When more than one child in a classroom is determined to have head lice or when there is the perception by parents that reinfestation of one or more children may have occurred in the classroom, the teacher should, with the approval of the principal:

- Instruct the children to take all personal belongings home for thorough cleaning or laundering.
- Avoid activities that may result in head to head contact.
- Discourage children from sharing combs, brushes, hair apparel, plush toys, headphones, pillows, and clothing (especially costumes).
- Put school or teacher-owned pillows, plush toys, or other objects a child may hold close to their face or head into a closed plastic bag and hold for 10 to 30 days; have them dry-cleaned or laundered, or discard if appropriate.
- Instruct children to hang outer garments at least 12 inches apart or store in individually labeled plastic bags. Hanging outer garments on the back of loose chairs is not an effective separation method because the chairs may be shoved together or fall over. Extra vigilance is needed when the children do not return directly to their classroom from outdoors.
- Monitor the safe use of plastic bags closely especially where younger children are present.

FOLLOW THESE PROCEDURES UNTIL ALL CHILDREN ARE DETERMINED TO BE LICE FREE.

✓ **SHOULDN'T THE CLASSROOM BE SPRAYED WHEN HEAD LICE ARE DISCOVERED?**

No, the application of a pesticide in the classroom is unacceptable and not recommended by either the National Pediculosis or the National Pest Control Associations. Since head lice are spread by direct head to head contact the treatment of the classroom environment with a pesticide is not considered effective or necessary.

✓ **IS THERE ANYTHING ELSE THAT CAN BE DONE TO CONTROL HEAD LICE IN THE CLASSROOM?**

The principal should request the custodial staff to thoroughly vacuum the carpet and upholstered furniture in the affected classrooms on a nightly basis. The vacuum cleaner bag should be disposed of after each night's use. A special vacuum with disposable bags may be borrowed from plant operations or the Office of Safety and Security (OSS). In addition, the principal may request an inspection by OSS during which the building supervisor and affected teachers will be interviewed and the effectiveness of their control procedures will be evaluated.



If you need assistance, call the safety section at 571-423-2010,
or the Health Department at 703-246-2433.