

STUDENTS

Management of Head Lice in the School Setting

Prince William County Public Schools/School Age Child Care follows the recommendations of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the Virginia Department of Health (VDH), the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), the National Association of School Nurses (NASN), and Harvard School of Public Health. Students found with live head lice do not need to be sent home early from school; they can go home at the end of the day, be treated, and return to class after appropriate treatment has begun. Nits may persist after treatment, but successful treatment should kill crawling lice. Nits are the eggs of head lice and may be found on the hair, scalp, or fibers of clothing. Students must be lice-free to return to school.

Current evidence does not support the efficacy and cost effectiveness of classroom or schoolwide screening for decreasing the incidence of head lice among school children.

Children are not required to be free of nits before they return to school.

Parents/guardians are encouraged to comb out as many nits as possible in order to avoid confusion as to whether or not the child has an active case of head lice. Removal of nits requires daily combing of the hair for seven-10 days with a fine-tooth nit comb.

A child who returns to school after treatment will be checked privately in the health office.

After consultation with Student Health Services, letters may be sent home to the parents of classmates when there are more than 10 percent of the students in the same classroom identified with head lice.

The Associate Superintendent for Special Education and Student Services (or designee) is responsible for implementing and monitoring this regulation.

This regulation and related policy shall be reviewed at least every five years and revised as needed.

Facts about Head Lice

Head lice are the cause of much embarrassment and misunderstanding, many unnecessary days lost from school/School Age Child Care (SACC) and work, and millions of dollars spent on remedies. Because no disease process is associated with head lice, schools/SACC are not advised to exclude students when nits remain after appropriate lice treatment, although further monitoring for signs of re-infestation is appropriate.

- I. Head lice feed on human blood several times a day and live close to human scalp.
- II. They do not spread disease and, therefore, are not considered a health hazard.
- III. Head lice move by crawling; they cannot hop or fly.
- IV. Transmission in most cases is direct head-to-head contact.
- V. It is not common to spread head lice by contact with clothing (such as hats, scarves, coats) or other personal items (combs, brushes, or towels).
- VI. Personal hygiene or cleanliness in the home or school/SACC has nothing to do with transmission of head lice.
- VII. Lice are not capable of moving to another host within the first few days of hatching and they do not reproduce within their first ten days.
- VIII. Nits may persist after successful treatment.
- IX. The gold standard for diagnosing head lice is finding a live louse, not nits, since studies show only 18 percent of nits go on to hatch.

Life Cycle Facts about Head Lice

I. Life Cycle of a Head Louse

The life cycle of a head louse has three stages:

- A. Eggs;
- B. Nymph; and
- C. Adult.

II. Eggs/Nits

- A. Nits are head lice eggs. They are hard to see and are often confused with dandruff or hair spray droplets.
- B. Nits are about one millimeter long, shaped like a tear drop, and may be pigmented to match the host hair color.
- C. Nits laid closer to the scalp are more viable since body temperature is important to hatching.
- D. Nits take about one week to hatch (range six to nine days). Viable eggs are usually located within six millimeters (1/4 inch) of the scalp.

III. Nymphs

- A. The egg hatches to release a nymph.
- B. The nit shell then becomes a more visible dull yellow and remains attached to the hair shaft.
- C. The nymph is about the size of a pinhead. After feeding, it can appear red (the color of blood).
- D. Nymphs mature after three molts and become adults about seven days after hatching.

IV. Adults

- A. The adult louse is about the size of a sesame seed, has six legs (each with claws), and is tan to grayish-white. In persons with dark hair, the adult louse will appear darker.
- B. Females are usually larger than males and can lay up to six-10 nits per day.
- C. The life span of the louse is up to 30 days on a person's head. To live, adult lice need to feed on blood several times daily. Without blood meals, the louse will die within one to two days off the host.

Head Lice Prevention and Treatment
Guidelines from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

- I. Before applying treatment, it may be helpful to remove clothing that can become wet or stained during treatment.
- II. Apply lice medicine, also called pediculicide, according to the instructions contained in the box or printed on the label. If the infested person has very long hair (longer than shoulder length), it may be necessary to use a second bottle. Pay special attention to the instructions on the label or in the box regarding how long the medication should be left on the hair and how it should be washed out.

WARNING: Do not use a combination shampoo/conditioner, or conditioner before using lice medicine. Do not re-wash the hair for one – two days after the lice medicine is removed.
- III. Have the infested person put on clean clothing after treatment.
- IV. If a few live lice are still found eight – 12 hours after treatment, but are moving more slowly than before, do not retreat. The medicine may take longer to kill all the lice. Comb dead and any remaining live lice out of the hair using a fine-toothed nit comb.
- V. If, after eight – 12 hours of treatment, no dead lice are found, and lice seem as active as before, the medicine may not be working. Do not retreat until speaking with your health care provider; a different pediculicide may be necessary. If your health care provider recommends a different pediculicide, carefully follow the treatment instructions contained in the box or printed on the label.
- VI. Nit (head lice egg) combs, often found in lice medicine packages, should be used to comb nits and lice from the hair shaft. Many flea combs made for cats and dogs are also effective.
- VII. After each treatment, checking the hair and combing with a nit comb to remove nits and lice every two – three days may decrease the chance of self-re-infestation. Continue to check for two – three weeks to be sure all lice and nits are gone. Nit removal is not needed when treating with spinosad topical suspension.
- VIII. Retreatment is meant to kill any surviving hatched lice before they produce new eggs. For some drugs, retreatment is recommended routinely about a week after the first treatment (seven – nine days, depending on the drug) and for others only if crawling lice are seen during this period. Retreatment with lindane shampoo is not recommended.

- IX. Supplemental Measures: Head lice do not survive long if they fall off a person and cannot feed. You do not need to spend a lot of time or money on housecleaning activities. Follow these steps to help avoid re-infestation by lice that have recently fallen off the hair or crawled onto clothing or furniture:
- A. Machine wash and dry clothing, bed linens, and other items that the infested person wore or used during the two days before treatment using the hot water (130° F) laundry cycle and the high heat drying cycle. Clothing and items that are not washable can be dry cleaned OR sealed in a plastic bag and stored for two weeks.
 - B. Soak combs and brushes in hot water (at least 130° F) for five – 10 minutes.
 - C. Vacuum the floor and furniture, particularly where the infested person sat or laid. However, the risk of getting infested by a louse that has fallen onto a rug or carpet or furniture is very small. Head lice survive less than one – two days if they fall off a person and cannot feed; nits cannot hatch and usually die within a week if they are not kept at the same temperature as that found close to the human scalp. Spending much time and money on housecleaning activities is not necessary to avoid re-infestation by lice or nits that may have fallen off the head or crawled onto furniture or clothing.
 - D. Do not use fumigant sprays; they can be toxic if inhaled or absorbed through the skin.