

Head Lice Management in Schools

Since 2009, the RLASD has followed the recommendations of the Center for Disease Control, the American Academy of Pediatrics and the National Association of School Nurses for its' management of head lice.

The following information is taken from the CDC website regarding management of head lice in the school setting. <http://www.cdc.gov/parasites/lice/head/schools.html>

Current evidence does not support the efficacy and cost-effectiveness of classroom or school-wide screening for head lice to reduce the number of head lice infestations among school children. "No-nits" policies that require a student to be free of nits before they can return to school are not recommended. Students diagnosed with live head lice should not be sent home early from school; they can go home at the end of the day, be treated, and return to class the next day. Excluding children from school because of head lice is not recommended.

The National Association of School Nurses has information on its website:

<http://www.nasn.org/ToolsResources/SCRATCHHeadLiceResources>

Thomas Lundquist, MD, Family Practice Physician at Marshfield Rice Lake Center and Medical Advisor to the Rice Lake Area School District recently reviewed our head lice management protocol, and is in agreement with our guidelines. When a student is suspected of having head lice (ie scratching head, visible nits in the hair, etc) the student is sent to the office for evaluation. If a head lice infestation is noted, the school nurse contacts the student's family, recommends shampooing with an effective head lice shampoo and reviews household cleaning recommendations with the parent/guardian. The student may remain in school until the end of the day or parents may opt to pick up their child and begin treatment if they so desire.

We do not check entire schools or classrooms. The school nurses work with families to provide information and resources so that treatment is complete and appropriate. Children with known head lice will be checked at school once treatment has been done at home. Notes to other parents will only be sent out if the nurses notice a pattern developing in a classroom or grade. Since there isn't a "season" for head lice, it is recommended that parents check their own children's heads weekly throughout the year.

FACTS

Anyone can get head lice. Head lice are small grayish-white to brown wingless bugs, about the size of small ants (1/8 inch). Head lice can live up to 48 hours off the body. They are contagious as long as they remain alive and until the eggs (nits) in the hair have been destroyed and removed. Head lice lay tiny, oval, whitish eggs that attach to the hair shaft with a gluey substance. They do not fall off the hair shaft with a flick of the finger, as does dandruff. Nits stay attached to the shaft of the hair. They are often seen in the hair at the back of the neck. The eggs of head lice hatch in a week and the head lice are able to reproduce in approximately two weeks.

Symptoms of head lice are itching and scratching of the scalp. Head lice cannot hop, jump, or fly but are passed along by close contact with persons who have had lice or with things they are using that have become infested (hats, scarves, brushes, pillows, chairs, car seats, etc.).

IF YOU FIND HEAD LICE IN YOUR FAMILY, FOLLOW THESE STEPS:

Obtain an effective shampoo at a drugstore. Remove the child's clothing which will be washed. Shampoo the hair according to the directions on the label. Read the label carefully. Some shampoos require application on dry hair. After shampooing and rinsing the hair as recommended, comb well with a fine-tooth comb to get rid of the nits. Special "nit combs" are available – metal combs seem to be most effective. Make sure that you remove all nits as shampoos do not seem to kill the eggs. Leaving one egg behind could result in a re-infestation from your own child's hair.

Have your child put on clean clothing after shampooing. Launder all clothing and bedding in very hot water (at least 20 minutes). Dry at high heat for at least 30 minutes. Nonwashable items should be dry cleaned or sealed in a plastic bag for 2 weeks. Other items such as combs and brushes should be boiled or soaked one hour in a mixture of insecticide shampoo and water. The backs of upholstered furniture, car seats, carpets, etc., should be thoroughly vacuumed. A hot iron may be used on the bed mattress or the child's favorite chair. Lice sprays may be used, but do not inhale this insecticide.

Examine other family members for head lice. Treat only those infested. Advise your child to never share hats or combs. Check your child weekly throughout the year for head lice.

If parents need assistance, please contact your child's school nurse.

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