

A Word About Lice

Lice are tiny (1-3mm) insects that live only on the human head. They feed by extracting tiny amounts of blood from the scalp. Lice are not known to spread any infectious disease and have little effect on the host other than itching and inconvenience. Active infestation with lice is diagnosed by the presence of live insects or egg sacks (nits) on the hair shaft close to the scalp. Lice do not fly or jump and are spread by close contact with someone who has an active case with live insects.

Every year millions of children, generally between the ages of 3-12, are diagnosed with lice. Lice move among all races, socioeconomic groups, and have little to do with cleanliness or lack of cleanliness. The most common way lice are spread is by shared bedding, family members sharing the same bed or friends at a sleep over. Lice may also be spread by sharing brushes, combs, and hats. The insects are not spread by casual contact (sitting next to a classmate in school).

The following is a list of measures that may help prevent the spread of lice:

- Do not share personal items
- Bring your own pillow and sleeping bag when staying at a friend's home
- Tie up long hair in braids or a bun when in close contact (at a sleep over)
- Parents should check their children's head periodically for the presence of lice or nits

DO NOT TREAT A CHILD UNLESS AN ACTIVE CASE OF LICE HAS BEEN IDENTIFIED. If someone in your household is diagnosed with an active case of lice follow the treatment recommended by your health care provider or pharmacist. Follow all instructions for treatment of the hair, scalp, and personal items. Unfortunately, in the past several years lice have become immune to some treatments. Repeated applications may be necessary to fully get rid of lice. Closely follow instructions and do not treat more often than recommended.

School absence is no longer recommended once treatment is started. It is also not recommended to do class or school wide screenings. Each case is treated individually. Families may or may not choose to report active cases. Confidentiality in the school setting does not permit disclosure of any individual's issues.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to call.

Sincerely,

Patricia Howard, RN, BSN

School Nurse