

**Resources:**  
**Center for Disease Control**  
**California Department of Public Health**

**5-19-09**

**Attention Parents:**

Please be advised that we have had a reported case of **Head Lice** in your child's class.

**Please check your child's head tonight to be sure we catch all cases of lice.**

For your reference, we are sending home an information sheet on treatment and prevention. All information is for educational purposes only. For specific medical advice, diagnosis and treatment consult your physician.

## **HEAD LICE FACT SHEET**

### **Signs and Symptoms**

Lice are tiny white, brown and gray parasites that can cause itching and scratching, especially on areas of the body that are covered with hair (typically the scalp, neck, and behind the ears.) If your child's hair is involved, you might be able to see the tiny lice eggs (called "nits"), which look like white grains of sand attached to the hair shafts. It is more common to see nits in a child's hair than it is to see live lice crawling on the scalp.

### **Description**

The head louse, *Pediculus humanus capitus*, though very small (2mm to 4mm long) can be seen by the human eye. Lice live among human hairs, draw blood from the skin (although the amount drawn is almost too little to measure), and lay eggs ("nits") on hair shafts, close to the skin surface, where the temperature is perfect for incubation. They have tiny claws on their legs that are adapted for feeding and clinging to hair or clothing. Their bites may cause inflammation and itching, and they can become infected. Temporarily, lice can live in clothing, bed linens, combs, brushes, and hats that have come in contact with an infested person. Kids and teens are most prone to catching lice because they are likely to share such personal items and because they are often in close physical contact with other infected children. Six to 12 million people are infested with lice each year.

### **Prevention**

Although a head lice infection is **not** a sign of uncleanness, you can help prevent lice by taking the following precautions:

- Avoiding physical contact with a person who has lice.
- Not sharing combs, brushes, hats, scarves, ribbons, or other personal items..
- Examining and treating members of your household who have had close contact with a person infected with lice.
- Keeping your child home from school or day care until the morning after treatment for lice.

### **Incubation**

Lice live approximately 40-50 days and go through 3 stages in their life cycle:

- Egg Stage: The adult female louse lays the egg with a special glue that cements it to the hair shaft near the root. The eggs develop and hatch approximately 10 days later.
- Nymph Stage: Once the louse hatches, it is called a nymph and is barely visible to the naked eye. The nymph cannot reproduce because it is not fully developed. After about 12 days, it becomes an adult.
- Adult Stage: The adult louse can lay up to 4-10 eggs a day — starting another generation of lice. The adult stage lasts about 28 days.

### **Contagiousness**

Lice are highly contagious. Although they don't fly in the air or walk on the ground, they can pass from person to person on clothing, bed linens, combs, brushes, or hats.

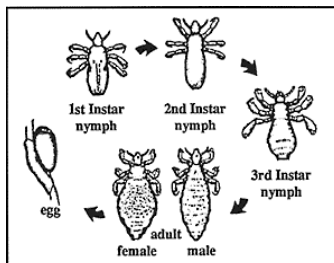
## How to Check for Head Lice

- Be sure there is adequate lighting when checking your child's head for lice. A brightly lit room or a flashlight will help you spot any lice or eggs. It is best to check for lice when the hair is wet.
- Begin at the nape (bottom) of the neck and work your way up. Lice and eggs can be anywhere on the head but they do prefer warmer places to hide. The lower hairline is a good place to start.
- Using either your finger or a tail comb, slowly part the hair down the middle, from the crown to the nape of the neck. Check the part for eggs on the hair shaft (small white specks attached to the hair shaft) or adult lice. The eggs will be well attached and should only be able to be removed by scraping off the hair with your finger nail.
- Once the first section is checked, part the hair either to the left or right of your original part in **very small sections**. Check this new parting for eggs and adult lice.
- Repeat this process throughout the entire back of the head, paying extra attention to the warmer spots at the nape, hairline and close to the ears.
- When the entire back portion of the head is complete, part your child's hair from the crown to the front hairline and repeat the process for the front of the hair.
- If lice are found on your child's head a pediculicide treatment should be started immediately. Be sure to follow the directions exactly as they are written. Different products may have different instructions.
- Ideally, 2 to 3 days should elapse after pediculicide treatment before the hair is washed. Repeating the treatment 7 to 10 days after the initial treatment is generally recommended to kill any newly hatched lice.
- Combing should start with small sections of wet hair, working from the scalp outwards. The process may take an hour or more each day for several days.

## Prevention and Control

Head lice are spread most commonly by direct head-to-head contact and less frequently by sharing personal items. The risk of getting infested by a louse that has fallen onto a carpet or furniture is very small. Head lice survive less than 1-2 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.

- *To help control a head lice outbreak in a community, school, or camp, children should be taught to avoid activities that may spread head lice.*
- Avoid head-to-head contact during play and other activities.
- Do not share clothing such as hats, scarves, coats, sports' uniforms, hair ribbons or barrettes.
- Do not share combs, brushes, or towels.
- The CDC recommends that all clothing and bedding in contact with the infested person during the 2 days before pediculicide treatment be laundered with hot water and placed in the dryer using the hot cycle. All nonwashable items should be quarantined in plastic bags for 2 weeks should any surviving eggs hatch in that time period. Disinfection of combs and brushes in hot water or alcohol is also recommended. Although various home fumigation products and insecticide sprays are marketed, no experimental or epidemiologic data are available to warrant their use.



### The Student May Return to School When They:

- Have no live lice and
- Have no nits.
- Have had their head checked in the health station and been given the "okay" to return to class.

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