

## **POLICY AND GUIDELINES FOR CONTROLLING HEAD LICE IN THE SCHOOL**

Head lice are wingless insects one to three millimeters in length. Exclusively parasites of man, they live on or near the scalp and attach their tiny eggs called nits, to hair shafts. A mature louse egg hatches in about a week, and the emerged nymph (baby louse) requires seven to ten days to become an adult. The adult lives another 20-30- days. A female louse will lay up to 4 or 5 eggs per day throughout this period.

Head lice are incapable of flying or jumping but they can crawl fairly rapidly. Head lice are mainly acquired by DIRECT head-to-head contact with an infested person's hair, but may infrequently be transferred with shared combs, hats, coats and other hair accessories. They may also remain on bedding or upholstered furniture for a brief period. Indirect transmission is limited because head lice can live only about 48 hours away from the human host. The eggs can live away from the host for about 10 days but will NOT hatch at room temperature or below.

Head lice are completely dependent on human blood which they suck from the bite wounds in the scalp. The bites produce intense itching which is frequently the first sign of the presence of lice. Scratching may lead to a secondary bacterial infection.

The diagnosis is confirmed by finding lice or nits. They are usually most common above and behind the ears and on the back of the head and neck. Nits should not be confused with dandruff, which can be easily flicked off a hair. Nits are TIGHTLY attached to the hair shaft and difficult to remove even with tweezers. Nit removal is ESSENTIAL in the treatment of head lice as no treatment has been found to be 100% effective in killing the eggs. Leaving nits in the hair can lead to re-infestation.

It is the position of the National Association of School Nurses and the Pediatrics Association that sending a child HOME from school with Lice or Nits is a disruption of the education process and should not be viewed as an essential strategy in the management of head lice. Furthermore, head lice are now considered a "public nuisance" and are no longer addressed by the Board of Health as a health issue, in that lice are not known to carry any form of disease.

The following guidelines will be followed by the school nurse should a child be found to have head lice while attending school:

**Source:** Bluffton-Harrison Metropolitan School District  
**Adopted:** April 28, 1997  
**Reviewed:** March 19, 2001, August 13, 2015  
**Revised:** July 23, 2001, April 8, 2013

1. The parent or guardian will be notified by phone or note that evidence of head lice has been found on their child.
2. An explanation will be given to the parent which will define the problem, suggest methods of treatment and disinfection, and request that other family members be examined for head lice.
3. The child will be allowed to return to the classroom for the remainder of the day unless a parent chooses to take the child home to begin treatment.
4. The school nurse will check the child following treatment. If evidence of head lice and/or nits are still present, the parent/guardian will again be notified by phone or note.

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