

Head Lice Information

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NORTH HAVEN PUBLIC SCHOOLS
Information Regarding Head Lice

October 11, 2012.

Dear Parent/Guardian:

This letter is to inform you about head lice, since several cases have been recently reported in our schools. This letter provides information about detection and treatment, along with a fact sheet from the Connecticut Department of Public Health, in order to help contain and limit the exposure among our students. At home, frequent and regular checks of your child's hair and scalp are very important. The lice, in adult form, are about (--) long and are usually tan or brown colored. They get their food supply (blood) from the scalp. Live lice do not have wings and therefore cannot fly. However, they do move very quickly, which makes them difficult to see. Because of this, the diagnosis of head lice infestation is frequently made on the basis of finding nits, which are the eggs of lice. Nits are teardrop/oval in shape, about (-) long, and are usually light tan or gray in color. They are attached to the hair shaft with a waterproof, cement-like substance. Nits cannot be washed or brushed out the way dandruff or other debris can. Dandruff flakes will fall off; nits will not. A special fine-tooth comb must be used, which is usually included in the box of specially medicated shampoo (pediculicide), made specifically for the treatment of lice. Clusters of nits may be found in any section of the hair, but in mild or early cases, a careful examination of the entire scalp may be necessary to detect them. A bright light directed at the scalp can be helpful for identification.

If you are suspicious, call and discuss the situation with your child's healthcare provider, who can advise you on the appropriate treatment for your child. Ordinary shampoo will not work. A second treatment may be necessary 7 to 10 days after the first treatment, along with thorough, daily combing until all nits are removed. While pediculicides rapidly kill crawling lice, they do not kill all the nits. Repeating the treatment in 7 to 10 days corresponds to the incubation period of the nits. Treatment should not be overused, because pediculicides contain chemicals that can be very irritating. Follow the manufacturer's directions for use, or according to the provider's instructions. Other articles of contact, such as clothing, towels and bed linens, will also need appropriate treatment by washing in hot water and dried using the hottest cycle in the dryer. Other objects that cannot be washed can be placed in the dryer for at least 20 minutes at the highest heat setting, or tightly bagged and sealed for a period of 10 days. Combs, brushes and similar items can be disinfected by soaking in the pediculicide shampoo for 1 hour, or by soaking in a pan of water heated on the stove to 150° for 5-10 minutes (caution: heat may damage some combs and brushes). Carpets and upholstered furniture should be thoroughly vacuumed- use of fumigants or insecticides on upholstered furniture, carpets, bedding, etc. is not recommended.

All family members should be examined and appropriately treated if lice or nits are found, since head lice are easily passed along through close contact with other infested individuals. Parents of your child's closest friends should also be notified. This is particularly important if the children have attended sleepovers together, or participated in activities involving close and frequent body contact. Caution your child not to use anyone else's comb, brush, hat, etc.

If you discover that your child does have head lice, please notify the school nurse immediately. Our school procedures specify that children with *untreated* head lice and/or nits are to be excluded. Once appropriately treated, the student may return to school, usually by the next day. Please be assured that our efforts here at school will be as sensitive and discreet as possible. Many people have the impression that lice become established on people who are unclean. In the case of head lice, this is not true. Whenever possible, the elementary school nurse will check the children in the classroom(s) where the condition has been identified, as well as the siblings of the confirmed case(s). Parents/guardians of any child identified with head lice will be contacted directly. If you identify and treat your child at home, please contact the school nurse to notify that this condition is present in the school. Your support and assistance is most appreciated.

Sincerely,
Annette Sauerbrunn RN, MPH
Charge Nurse

Head Lice - Fact Sheet

What are head lice?

Head lice are blood sucking parasites. They are approximately the size of a sesame seed, 1-2 mm. They do not have wings and, therefore, cannot fly. They also do not jump. They do, however, move quickly. The eggs of the louse, which are called "nits", are teardrop shaped and approximately half the size of the adult louse. The nits are attached to the hair shaft with a waterproof, cement-like substance from the adult female. Thus, nits cannot be simply washed or brushed out of the hair.

Who can get head lice?

Anyone who comes in contact with louse infested items can get head lice. Some people think lice become established on persons who are unclean. This is not true. Frequent bathing will neither prevent head lice nor eliminate an infestation once it has become established.

How are head lice spread?

Head lice are usually transmitted through close personal contact with another infested individual or through use of common combs, brushes, and other grooming aids; through sharing hats, caps, coats; or through co-mingling of these items at the homes of friends, at school, at church, or other public places.

What are the symptoms of infestation with head lice?

The major symptom of head lice is itching, which is due to the presence of salivary fluid produced by the insect as it feeds.

How do you eliminate head lice?

Treatment is directed at the infested individual and his personal articles (e.g., caps, combs, brushes, towels, and bedding). Fumigation or use of insecticides in the home, school, or school buses is not recommended.

A. Individual Treatment:

Individual treatment usually requires using an over-the-counter (OTC) or prescription medication and a nit (head lice egg) comb.

WARNING: Do not use a creme rinse or combination shampoo/conditioner before using lice medicine. Do not re-wash hair for 1-2 days after treatment.

Follow these treatment steps:

1. Before application of the OTC or prescription treatment, remove all clothing from the waist up.
2. Apply the lice medicine according to label instructions. If your child has hair longer than shoulder length, you may need to use two bottles. It is important to pay special attention to instructions on the bottle regarding how long the medication should be left on and whether rinsing the hair is recommended after treatment.
3. After treatment, have the infested person put on clean clothing.
4. Nit 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.
5. After treatment, check the hair every 2-3 days, and comb with a nit comb to remove nits and lice as necessary. Continue to check for 2-3 weeks until you are sure all lice and nits are gone.
6. If an OTC medicine was used, retreat in 7-10 days. If the prescription drug malathion was used, retreat in 7-10 days ONLY if crawling bugs are found.

B. Decontamination of Personal Articles and Environment:

Treat the household: If head lice fall off of a person and cannot feed, they will not survive very long. It is not necessary to spend a lot of time or money on housecleaning activities. You can help avoid re-infestation by lice that may have recently fallen off the hair or crawled onto clothing or furniture by following these steps.

1. To kill lice and nits, all washable clothing and bed linens that the infested person wore or used during the 2 days before treatment should be machine washed in hot water (130°F). After the hot wash, the laundry should be dried at high heat for at least 20 minutes.
2. For clothing that is not washable, have it dry cleaned. (e.g., coats, hats, scarves).
3. All clothing, stuffed animals, comforters, etc. that cannot be washed or dry cleaned can be stored for 2 weeks in a plastic bag that is sealed with tape.
4. Combs and brushes can be soaked for 1 hour in rubbing alcohol, Lysol*, or wash with soap and hot (130°F) water.
5. Vacuum the floor and furniture. There is a small risk of getting re-infested from a louse that has fallen onto the carpet or onto a sofa. Vacuum the places where the infested person usually sits or lays, spending a lot of time on this is not necessary. Do not use fumigant sprays; they can be toxic if inhaled or absorbed through the skin.

C. Prevent Reinfestation:

The most common way to spread lice is through direct head-to-head contact. It is less likely for lice to spread by crawling onto clothing or belongings. To control head lice outbreaks in a community, school or camp setting, children can be taught to avoid activities that are likely to spread lice.

1. Avoid head-to-head contact during play at school and at home (on a playground, sleep over party, camp, sports outing).
2. Do not share any items that may have had contact with someone else's head (e.g., hats, scarves, hair ribbons, coats, sports uniforms).
3. Do not share combs, brushes, or towels.
4. If you are aware that someone has a lice infestation, do not lie on the beds, couches, pillows, carpets, or stuffed animals that the infested person may have had contact with.

* Lysol is a registered trademark. The mention of this product does not constitute an endorsement by the Connecticut Department of Public Health.

This fact sheet is for informational purposes only. It should not be used for self-diagnosis or as a substitute for consultation with a health care provider. If you think that you may have this infection, or have questions about the disease described above, you should consult your health care provider.

For additional information on this disease, visit the [Centers of Disease Control and Prevention](https://www.cdc.gov) website.