

## A NOTE FROM THE SCHOOL NURSE 2010-11

Each year many students get head lice. Although head lice are not a major health concern, the experience can be very disheartening. Especially since some strains of head lice are becoming resistant to the current treatment regimens.

Head lice are not choosy as to what type of hair they prefer. The louse is said to be an equal opportunity, gender blind, ethnically diverse parasite. In other words, no one is immune. The best way to decrease your chances of getting lice is to discourage sharing of personal items that may be carrying the louse. (I.e. combs, hats, barrettes, bedding).

When a case of head lice is discovered at school, the School Nurse or Principal's designee checks any siblings in the district and classmates that may have had direct head to head contact with the infested student. **Prevention** is the best cure. Unfortunately, this is not always possible. I recommend that parents check their child's hair weekly to ensure early detection. If you discover that your child has head lice, please notify the School Nurse or Principal/designee as soon as possible. The sooner we are aware of the problem, the better able we are in preventing the spread to other students.

If a student has symptoms while at school, trained personnel check the student, and if a live louse is found the parents/guardians are notified by phone. Instructions are given along with this information packet. The school nurse also has access to donated lice killing shampoo to give to families that cannot afford the product. Children can return to school after proper treatment. In some cases, that may mean returning to school the same day.

The following information will be helpful to you and your family in the prevention and treatment of head lice.

### **General Information**

As reported by the American Academy of pediatrics: "Head lice infestation is common in the United States among children 3 to 12 years of age; approximately 6 to 12 million have infestations each year. Head lice are not a health hazard or a sign of uncleanliness and are not responsible for the spread of any disease."

The head louse is a parasite that lives on the scalp of humans and feeds on their blood. The main route of transmission is direct head to head contact. However, sharing personal items such as hats, brushes, combs, and barrettes can also spread lice... Lice need human blood to survive. Without human blood a louse will die in 24 hours. Therefore, a louse cannot live on pets. Lice do not hop, jump or fly. They move around on the head by pulling themselves along the hair strands. The life expectancy of a louse is between 30-40 days. A female louse is capable of laying eggs (nits) 7-10 days after it hatches and can lay as many as 100-200 during its life. A louse is clear to white and very small, about the size of a point of a pencil, when it first hatches. After the louse feeds on human blood, it becomes a reddish brown color. In about a week it will grow to the size of a sesame seed.

The eggs that are laid by the female louse are a white/gray color. They are tear drop shaped and are fastened to the side of a hair strand by the louse. An egg cannot be flicked off of the hair strand like dandruff or shampoo residue. An egg will hatch approximately 7-10 days after it is laid. Total egg removal is the **only** way to ensure that reinfestation will **not** occur.

Please refer to the attached “Fact Sheet” regarding Head Lice Infestation from the Wisconsin Division of Public Health.

### **Treatment Options:**

**\*\*\*\*Only treat family members who have signs of lice or lice eggs.**

- 1) Over the counter lice shampoos are pesticides and should be used only as needed according to package directions. Read the directions carefully because some of the products need to be applied to dry hair and others to wet hair. (For more information, please refer to the attached article that is published by Lice shampoos do not kill all of the lice and eggs, so it is essential to meticulously remove all of the lice and eggs after treatment to prevent reinfestation.**
- 2) Alternative treatment options:  
Suffocation of live lice may be accomplished by covering the hair with a thick application of mayonnaise, Vaseline, a tub of butter or olive oil for 12 hours. A shower cap over the solution will help hold it on the hair. The solution can be washed out after 12 hours with regular shampoo. This should be used if other methods have failed. The effectiveness of alternate treatments is unclear. As with lice shampoo, complete removal of all the eggs is essential to prevent reinfestation.**
- 3) Nit Removal  
Complete egg/nit removal is the best way to ensure that reinfestation will not occur. The eggs can be removed from the hair shaft by grasping the egg between your fingernails or tweezers and pulling. The hair shaft, with the egg on it, can also be cut off with a small pair of scissors. Dispose of all removed eggs in the garbage or wash then down the sink after removal. Lice combs can also be purchased at most drug stores and may work on some hair types.**
- 4) Cleaning the environment:  
Never use lice sprays!!! The lice sprays are potentially harmful and do little to eliminate lice/eggs. Vacuuming is the safest and best way to remove fallen lice or eggs from furniture, mattresses, car seats and carpets. Linens and**

**clothes worn in the last three days, including jackets and hats, should be washed in hot water with laundry soap. After washing, dry the linens and clothes in a hot dryer for a minimum of 20 minutes. Any plush items that cannot be laundered, such as down comforters and stuffed animals, should be sealed in a large plastic bag for 3 weeks.**

**Soak combs, brushes and barrettes in hot water (>130degrees F), Lysol, rubbing alcohol or a lice-killing chemical for 1hour.**

Sincerely,

Kerri R. Schmidt RN, BSN, NCSN  
School District Nurse (715-365-9235)