Dear Parents,

The following information is provided to help you better understand how to deal with the prevention and treatment of head lice for your children and your family.

What are the signs and symptoms of head lice infestation?

- Tickling feeling of something moving in the hair.
- Itching, caused by an allergic reaction to the bites of the head louse.
- Irritability and difficulty sleeping; head lice are most active in the dark.
- Sores on the head caused by scratching. These sores can sometimes become infected with bacteria found on the person's skin.

How did my child get head lice?

Head-to-head contact with is the most common way to get head lice. Head-to-head contact is common during play at school, at home, and elsewhere (sports activities, playground, slumber parties, camp).

Uncommonly, head lice may be spread by sharing clothing or belongings onto which lice or nits may have crawled or fallen. Examples include:

- sharing clothing (hats, scarves, coats, sports uniforms) or articles (hair ribbons, barrettes, combs, brushes, towels, stuffed animals) recently worn or used by a person with lice.
- lying on a bed, couch, pillow, or carpet that has recently been in contact with person with lice. The risk of getting an infestation by a louse or nit that has fallen onto a carpet or furniture is very small.

Dogs, cats, and other pets do not play a role in the spread of human lice. Lice cannot hop or jump.

What are Head Lice?

Lice or Pediculosis are small, grayish white, wingless bugs, about the size of a sesame seed. They have six legs and can look darker on people with dark hair. Head Lice live on human blood by biting the scalp. Lice lay oval, hard, whitish nits (eggs), on the hair shaft, usually less than one half inch from the scalp. Often nits can be mistaken for dandruff. Nits are firmly attached to the hair shaft with a natural glue substance. Lice are often found behind the ears, near the back of the neck, or right at the crown of the head. Head Lice are rarely found on the body, eyelashes, or eyebrows. The main problem with Head Lice is severe itching. A telltale sign is a tickling feeling or something moving on the head. If the skin is broken from scratching, infection can occur.

What is the Life Cycle of a Louse?

The life cycle of a head louse is about a month. The female will lay eggs on the hair shaft at the rate of approximately 4 per day. These eggs hatch in 7 to 10 days. Within another 10 days, the newly hatched louse can begin the cycle all over again. With human blood to live on, during their 30-day life span, it is not unusual for female lice to lay close to 100 nits. Although we are unsure how long a louse can live without blood, it has been said that they can live for 2 to 5 days without being on a person. Nits can survive for up to ten days before they will hatch. Here is a picture to help you:

![Life Cycle of a Louse](image)

How do you treat Head Lice?

Once Head Lice infestation starts it can spread rapidly, so prompt treatment needs to happen. You can check with your pediatrician or physician, but there are over the counter shampoos, lotions, gels and sprays to help you if you get Head Lice. There are also
prescription strength shampoos and it is a good idea to call your physician to see what they suggest or you can call the Health Department. Once treated with the shampoo, you need to comb out all the nits with the special Lice comb and sometimes may need to use your fingers to pull them out. You also need to wash all your linens, pillows, blankets, clothes in HOT water and dry on high heat (120 degrees) for 30 minutes. Any item that cannot be washed, you can bag and seal it up for two weeks. Vacuum sofas, carpeting, furniture, and remember to vacuum your cars paying special attention to head rests and using the crevice tool to get into the cracks of seats. Make sure to throw away your vacuum bags. Treat all your brushes, combs, hair accessories by disinfecting in hot water for 20 minutes or discard them.

What are some preventative measures?

Other than the above washing, drying and treatment, you can teach your children to help in the following ways:

- Do not share brushes, combs, hair accessories, hats, scarves, etc
- Keep clothing items not used in their back packs when not using.
- Do not share helmets, head sets, other items that may be touching the head. Utilize lice spray disinfectant on all of these types of equipment if sharing and wipe clean.
- Check your children when they come home from school and also after they participate in after school activities, or sleepovers.
- During increased cases of Head lice, you can avoid sleep-overs and hair salon parties to cut down on the risk of spreading head lice.
- There are preventative products such as Tea Tree shampoo, gels, etc that you can put on your child’s hair to help repel lice.
- Have your child wear their hair up if long and out of their face.
- Minimize close head to head contact.

Please remember that head lice can be transmitted in many types of environments and from heads with very clean and combed hair. Head Lice are actually very common and about 12 million people get head lice every year. **Diligence is required to rid your family of head lice and keeping informed is very important.** Please let me know if I can help answer any of your questions.

Best regards,

Your school nurse

This information was compiled using the following sources:

Centers for Disease Control, National Pediculosis Association, Medline Plus, Harvard School of Public Health, and Childfun.com