

Dear Parents,

Head lice are a perennial problem of childhood and it is a rare family that gets through their children's school years without a visit from the little critters.

In general, Gilman follows the recommendations of the American Academy of Pediatrics Clinical Report on Head Lice published in 2010. (<http://aappolicy.aappublications.org/cgi/reprint/pediatrics;126/2/392.pdf>) While the report takes a detailed, evidence-based look at the problem and treatment options, the overall message is that "no healthy child should be excluded from or allowed to miss school time because of head lice". That being said, the diagnosis of head lice can cause "a high level of anxiety among parents". And although head lice do not carry disease or represent any public health threat, treatment can be a nuisance. In order to address potential concerns, please see the FAQs below:

1. My son told me that his head is itchy. Could it be head lice? What should I look for?

The head lice diagnosis is a notoriously difficult one. The definitive clue is the presence of live lice. But lice are shy and move quickly and so are hard to spot. Nits, which are the egg sacs that the lice glue to the hair shaft, do not necessarily indicate an **active** infection. Many things, like dry skin flakes can masquerade as nits, confusing the issue even more. You can see pictures of lice and nits on the [IdentifyUS](#) website noted below.

If you have any doubts, you can have your son's head checked by his health care provider and/or bring him to the Gilman Health Center. Sherry Carter and I have a wonderful magnifying glass, a special light and comb and are here from 7:30 – 4:00 on school days. We are happy to look at your son's head and answer questions about identification, treatment, etc. We will check parents' and siblings' heads as well. Pay us a visit, we are here for you!

2. I found a live louse and feel overwhelmed and alone. Why is this happening to me?!

Rest assured you are not alone. Head lice have been humans' companions since the dawn of time and are no reflection on your family's cleanliness or housekeeping skills. In fact, head lice actually prefer a nice clean head of hair. If you ask around, you will find plenty of people who have dealt with the same problem and are more than willing to commiserate and share tips.

3. My friend is telling me to putting mayonnaise and plastic wrap on my son's head at bedtime. Good idea?

There are many home cures for head lice and some of them may actually work but do you really want mayo all over your house? When push comes to shove, the gold standard for lice eradication is a scientifically-tested shampoo treatment and plus combing with a good-quality fine-tooth lice comb. I recommend spending a bit more money and upgrading from the plastic comb that comes with the lice shampoo to a sturdier metal one. For more specifics about treatment, see the AAP Clinical Report or the CDC website below.

4. Another friend told me to hire a cleaning service and have the house fumigated. What do you think?

Not needed unless you were looking for an excuse to spring clean your house. Lice cannot hop, fly or jump. Their only mode of transportation is crawling and they much prefer staying on the head they know rather than setting off for parts unknown. As the AAP says, "Herculean cleaning measures are not beneficial". As for the anti-lice spray, it is not necessary. Please see the AAP report for specific cleaning recommendations. If you are overwhelmed by the task, there are reputable companies that will come to your home to check heads and make recommendations for cleaning. The link for [Lice Happens](#) is noted below. I know that many Gilman families have used their services and been very happy. And I love their motto: "No Shame, No Blame"!

5. What will happen if you find lice on my son's head at school?

If a student complains of an itchy scalp, his teacher will send him to the Health Center to be evaluated. Sherry or I will use our lighted magnifying glass and lice comb to inspect your son's scalp. If we find live lice, we will make a determination as to whether your son can stay in school. This decision will be based on the child's age, the level of infestation and the child's comfort level. If we find nits but no live lice, we will notify parents and develop a plan of action based on the viability of the nits. There is no need for a child with nits to be excluded from school. We will keep your son's information confidential and do everything possible to make him feel at ease and limit embarrassment.

6. My daughter's school deals with head lice differently. Why aren't you doing what her school does?

We feel very confident that our evidence-based policy offers the best balance between protecting children and avoiding unnecessary time away from the classroom. For example, some schools may exclude children with nits in their hair or perform head checks for an entire grade. Neither one of these practices has been shown to have any effect on the spread of lice in schools. And both take away from important classroom time.

7. My son's class rests on towels during the day. Can't the lice spread from towel to towel?

Teachers are well-aware of the need to prevent children from sharing personal items like hats, coats and towels and they do their very best to make sure that students are avoiding head-to-head contact. In addition, classrooms are cleaned and vacuumed daily. If you have specific concerns about practices in your son's classroom please let me and his classroom teacher know as soon as possible.

8. Is there any way to prevent head lice infestation?

Unfortunately, there is no magic bullet. There really is no way to avoid head lice and, in fact, you should assume that there are cases of head lice at school, sleepovers, sports teams, school buses, etc. The best approach is to check and comb your child's head regularly (once a week with a fine-toothed lice comb). This way, you can detect the lice before they have a chance to establish themselves.

Head lice are an annoying nuisance and a pain for those who are dealing with them. Working together, schools and parents can lessen the negative effects on students' lives. Again, the Gilman School Health Center is here for you. Please let us know if you have any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,
Edie Meacham RN, MSN
School Nurse

Resources:

IdentifyUs: Has great FAQ sheet, treatment guidelines and advice. <https://identify.us.com/>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: <http://www.cdc.gov/parasites/lice/head/>

Lice Happens: <http://www.licehappens.com/>