

The key to ending lice infestation is complete removal of all nits and cleaning the environment. Nits can be removed with nit combs, fingernails or by cutting the strands of hair that contain the nits. There are products on the market to loosen the “glue” attaching the nit to the hair shaft. Vinegar is also effective. Apply a damp towel soaked in vinegar to the head for 30-60 minutes before attempting nit removal. Remember, ALL nits need to be removed to prevent repeating the life cycle. This is a painstaking job but necessary. There is a reason for the term “nit picking”. Wash and dry any clothing or bedding that has recently come in contact with your child’s head. Vacuuming and bagging items in plastic bags is not necessary but if it makes you feel better, do it!

PREVENTION

Head lice infestations are bothersome and can take a lot of time to clear up. So, prevention is very important. Teach your children not to share combs, brushes, hair ornaments and hats. This includes trying on hats in the store. Confine long loose hair in ponytails or braids. **Most importantly, do regular head checks on your children. This way you are likely to catch an infestation before it gets too far or spreads to other family members.**

**Schools do not catch head lice.
People do.**

PCPS Head Lice Protocol

Head lice are often a fact of life for school-age children. While inconvenient, they are not a health hazard or a sign of poor hygiene; in contrast to body lice, they are not responsible for the spread of any disease. Head lice are small parasitic insects that live on the scalp and neck hairs of their human hosts. The management of head lice should not disrupt the educational process.

PCPS supports the following facts about head lice:

- Head lice are common and are not associated with any significant health conditions
- Healthy children should not be excluded from or miss school because of head lice
- In-school transmission is rare
- Stigmatization of children with head lice must not be permitted
- Presence of head lice is not an indication of poor hygiene
- Head lice screening programs have not had a significant effect on the incidence of head lice in the school setting over time and are not proven to be cost-effective
- Individual children with suspected head lice can be screened by the school nurse, but classroom-wide or school-wide screenings is not merited
- Children who fail standard treatment should be referred to their primary care provider

Prevention is the key.

- Do weekly head checks on your children.
- Teach your children not to share hats, personal headgear, combs, brushes, and hair ornaments.
- Confine long loose hair and ask your children not to play with other children’s hair.

Poquoson City Public Schools Health Services



Home Care Tips

For

The Prevention and Treatment of Head Lice

Merely mention head lice in a conversation and people's heads begin to itch. Head lice evoke strong reactions from parents, teachers and students. There are numerous myths and misconceptions surrounding head lice; their prevention, treatment and mode of transmission. The following information is provided to allow the reader to deal with head lice infestations confidently.

WHAT THEY ARE/WHAT THEY ARE NOT

The head louse (*Pediculus humanus capitis*) is a flat, wingless insect with three pairs of legs, each ending in a claw. They crawl from place to place and must pull themselves through strands of hair or fibers. Head lice feed on human blood and live on human hair. Head lice cannot fly or jump. Head lice cannot crawl on hard, smooth surfaces. Head lice do not live on pets.

LIFECYCLE OF A LOUSE

Adult females lay 3-10 nits (eggs) a day and as many as 60-100 in their 30 day lifetime. Nits are attached to a hair with fixative cement secreted by the louse that makes them very difficult to remove,

Nits hatch in 7-10 days. Nits cannot hatch at temperatures less than 82 degrees, but may remain viable and hatch if returned to an optimum temperature between 82-95 degrees. Therefore, cold does not kill nits.

Once hatched, the baby louse, called a nymph, goes through three stages before becoming an adult capable of reproducing. It takes 7-12 days. Lice need a blood meal within 5 hours of hatching or they die. After that they can survive 6-48 hours away from the host.

TRANSMISSION

Adult head lice and nymphs can be spread from person-to-person or from contaminated object-to-object. Nits cannot be spread person-to-person or from contaminated object-to-person without some very creative circumstances

Head lice do not spread disease.

Head lice are not an indication of poor personal hygiene or living in an unclean environment.

IDENTIFYING AN INFESTATION

The only way to be sure a person is infested with head lice is to either see the nits (eggs) or live lice. The nits are easier to see, but can often be confused with dandruff. Nits are small (the size of the eye of a needle), silvery to beige in color and oval shaped. Look for them in the hot spots on the head; at the nape of the neck, behind the ears, and at the crown. They are commonly found ¼ inch from the scalp. Nits can be found farther away in warmer climates or if the lice have been present for several weeks. Remember that lice may be present from 4-6 weeks before they are noticeable to the naked eye.

If you see something small and beige in color on the hair, try to flick it off or pull against it. If you feel resistance (it's glued on) and there is more than one, it is probably a nit and is an indication of a head lice infestation.

Live lice are more difficult to see. When newly hatched they are almost clear in color. As they grow and feed they become darker. They have a tick-like shape and are the size of a sesame seed. They do not like light, so move quickly whenever the hair is disturbed. This is what makes live lice so difficult to see.

Intense head itching is also an indication of a lice infestation. Itching is caused by the lice biting the scalp and inserting an anticoagulant. It is the body's reaction to the chemical that caused the itching. Therefore, itching is usually a late sign of head lice infestation. The person probably has been infested for several weeks.

If you are not sure that you child has an active case of head lice, please check with your School Nurse before you treat.

TREATMENT

Treatment for head lice involves three steps:

- Killing and/or removing the live lice
- Removing all the nits
- Cleaning the environment

When Lice Are Found

- Treat lice infestation immediately.
- Follow treatment recommendations carefully. **Do not over treat.**
- Remove **all** nits from the hair.
- Completely wash all bedding, clothing worn in the past 2-3 days, bed toys, etc. in hot water and dry on hot cycle for at least 20 minutes.
- Soak all brushes and combs in hot soapy water.
- It is not necessary to vacuum carpets, upholstered furniture and car seats but you may feel better in doing so.
- **Sprays are not recommended and should not be used.**
- Treatment, cleaning, and nit removal must all be done at the same time to prevent re-infestation.
- Check all family members. Treat only those individuals that are infested.
- Inform your child's school, daycare, and social contacts so that others may be checked if necessary
- Do not send your child to school if he/she has an untreated lice infestation.

Authorities:

- National Association of School Nurses (NASN)- Pediculosis Management in the School Setting Position Statement (2011)
- American Academy of Pediatrics Revised Clinical Report- AAP Offers Updated Guidance on Treating Head Lice (2005)
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2010)
- American School Health Association (2005)