

PORT NECHES-GROVES INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT

INFORMATION ABOUT HEAD LICE TO PARENTS

Head lice is an easily treated condition that is generally not associated with any serious radical complications. This letter will acquaint you with the nature of head lice and what should be done to get rid of it.

How you get it: Head lice are usually transmitted through close personal contacts with another infested individual; through sharing combs, brushes, and other grooming aides; through sharing hats, homes of friends, at school, at church, or other public places. Most parents have the impression that only persons who are unclean become infested with lice. In the case of head lice, this is NOT true. Frequent bathing will neither prevent head lice nor eliminate an infestation once it has become established.

What to look for: Head lice are elongated insects about this long (--) and are grayish white with dark margins. Lice do not have wings and, therefore, CANNOT fly. Although they do NOT jump, they do move very quickly; this makes them difficult to find in a child's hair.

Since crawling forms are difficult to find, head louse infestation is frequently diagnosed by finding nits. A nit is a louse egg. Nits are teardrop-shaped, about this size (-), and vary from yellowish-brown to white. Head lice attach each nit to a hair shaft with a waterproof, cement-like substance. Thus, nits cannot be washed out or brushed out of the hair like dandruff or other debris that may look like nits to the naked eye. Clusters of nits may be found in any section of hair, but in light infestations, a careful examination of the entire scalp may be necessary to detect them.

Treatment: It is necessary to treat the infested individual and his or her personal articles, e.g., caps, combs, brushes, towels, and bedding. The U.S. Public Health Service does NOT recommend fumigating or using insecticides in the home, school, and school buses.

A. Individual Treatment

1. Remove all your child's clothing and place him or her in a bath or shower stall.
2. Apply head louse shampoo according to your physician's instructions or the label instructions provided by the drug manufacturer. Several medications (pediculicides) are available for head lice: a-200 Pyrinate, Kwell, RED, NIX, Triple X., etc. Trade names are for identification purposes only and do not necessarily constitute endorsement. Kwell is available by prescription only; the others may be purchased without prescription from the drugstore. No published evidence indicates that one medication is superior to the others.
3. Have your child put on clean clothing after the treatment.
4. Repeat the treatment in 7-10 days. (While the pediculicides mentioned above rapidly kill crawling lice, then do not kill all nits. Therefore, the treatment should be repeated in 7-10 days to kill the newly hatched lice. The 7-10 day interval corresponds to the incubation period of a louse's egg.)
5. All family members and close friends of your child should be examined. Family members who have crawling forms or nits should be treated, even if there is no evidence of infestation at the time of the examination.

B. Decontamination of Personal Articles and Environment: Since heat kills lice and their eggs, many personal articles can be disinfected by machine washing in HOT water and/or drying using the HOT cycle of the dryer. Eggs are killed in five (5) minutes at 51.5°C (125°F), and adult lice succumb to slightly lower temperatures. Home hot water heaters keep water about 60°C when the heater selector is set on medium or high. However, some water heaters do not sustain the 60° water temperature when several loads of laundry are washed one after the other or when other demands for hot water (e.g., bathing) are made simultaneously. To maintain the water at 60°C or higher, allow time between loads of laundry or baths for the water heater to regain its maximum water temperature. If you depend on the clothes dryer for disinfestation, dry articles for at least 20 minutes at the high heat setting. Some non-washable articles may be disinfected in the dryer if the heat will not harm them.

1. Machine wash all washable clothing and bed linens that have been in contact with your child the previous two (2) days.
2. Personal articles of clothing or bedding that cannot be washed or dried may be dry-cleaned or simply placed in a plastic bag and sealed for 10 days.
3. Combs, brushed, and similar items can be disinfected by soaking them for 1 hour in one of the pediculicides shampoos or by soaking them for 5-10 minutes in a pan of water heated on the stove to about 150°F. (Caution: heat may damage some combs and brushes)
4. Because lice can live only a short time if they fall OFF the head, the U. S. Public Health Service recommends that you limit cleaning of carpets, upholstered furniture, etc., to simple vacuuming. Using insecticides or fumigants on upholstered furniture, carpets, bedding, etc. is NOT necessary.

Notification of other parents: Parents of your child's closet friend(s) should be notified that their child may also be infested. This is particularly important if the children have slept together or participated in activities involving frequent body contact, such as wrestling, ballet classes, football, etc.

Returning to School:

1. Your child may return to school the morning after he or she has been treated with a head louse (pediculicide) shampoo.
2. Approval of school nurse.
3. Note or phone call indicating method of treatment.

If you have any questions about head lice and the recommended treatment, please call the school nurse.