

Dear Parent/Guardian,

There have been some cases of head lice in our school. This is not unusual, however, lice have become more difficult to treat over the years. Controlling an outbreak involves early diagnosis and effective treatment. So that we can stay ahead of this issue, I would like to ask that parents/guardians perform weekly checks of students during the school year at home. A good head check can take about 15 minutes, especially in an early infection.

Head Lice are very small, tan or gray, six legged insects **that feed only on humans**. They cannot fly or jump, but they can crawl quite fast. Lice live for up to 35 days once hatched from an egg (nit). A female will lay about 4-10 eggs per day. That's a lot of eggs for such a short life! That's why it's important to catch it as early as possible with weekly head checks at home. The fewer number of eggs to comb or pick out, the better. When you begin the head check, search for the nits (eggs). They are white/tan/silver colored, and are firmly attached to the hair, close to the scalp because they need to stay warm to hatch. They are shaped like a sesame seed, but smaller, and stick to the hair by "lice glue". If you suspect that you are seeing the nits, begin the search for a living louse. A louse varies in size. It is very tiny in the early stages of life, and grows to be about the size of a sesame seed before it dies. They are hard to spot because they move fast and don't like light. Use a bright light and a lice comb to find them (metal combs work best). Toothpicks or the ends of Q tip sticks can be used to rake the hair during your search if you do not have a lice comb. Only treat the head if you actually find an infection.

I have read varying reports regarding how long a louse can survive without a human meal. Some say 24-48 hours and others say up to 10 days (for nits). I am going to settle on 1-10 days to be safe. Lice are spread by direct contact with them or their eggs that will eventually hatch if kept in a warm, moist environment. They cannot jump from one person to another, but if one happens to fall off of your friend and attaches itself to you, your clothing, bedding/pillows, hats, scarves, carpeting, couch or any other place that you touch within that 1 -10 day survival period, then you may become the louse's new home. Lice do not care if their new home is clean or dirty, only that it has a never ending supply of food. One telltale sign that you may be infected is frequent head scratching. They do not carry diseases and therefore usually cause no harm to infected persons.

What to do if you find lice:

**-Treat the infected head.**

There are a ton of products available over the counter, by prescription, or naturally.

Follow the manufacturer's instructions if you decide to use a chemical product.

Some require a waiting period to retreat, so read all instructions carefully. Treating only one time is not going to end the life cycle. The eggs take 7-10 days to hatch. If they survive the initial treatment, which is very possible due to recent resistance, the life cycle will begin again. So, there is almost always more than one treatment needed.

**-Lice check the family.**

Only treat those infected.

Continue to check heads every day for several weeks following an infection.

**-Wash/Clean the environment daily for at least 2 weeks.**

This includes vacuuming flooring (not sweeping) and emptying the bag afterwards to an outside trash container.

Wash coats, scarves, hats, clothing, bedding, pillows, stuffed animals, combs, brushes, towels and toys in very hot water and dry with high heat (over 130 degrees).

Anything that is not washable, such as back packs or toys, place in a plastic bag and seal for 2 weeks.

Dry cleaning is also an option to kill un-washable linens or clothing.

Disinfect combs and brushes by boiling for 10 minutes, soaking in medicated shampoo for 4 minutes or soaking in Lysol (2%) solution for one hour.

Continue to check head's daily.

(Remember that while treating infected individuals, you must clean the comb between each pass in very hot water. The hotter the better.)

**-Report head lice to school nurse at 757-220-4583.**

Return to school clinic for re-entrance to school after treatment.

York County currently has a no nit policy. Children should be lice and nit free upon returning to school.

### Transmission

Whenever people gather together, the possibility of head lice transmission exists. Head to head contact is the primary mode of transmission, but contact with infected hair pieces/combs/brushes is a possibility too. Prevention involves encouraging children to maintain their own body space. Not playing with other's hair, not sharing hair bows, ties, combs, hats and brushes. At sleepovers kids should use their own pillows and not sleep in crowded beds with head to head contact.

### Health Risk

Lice do not carry or transmit diseases. A potential health risk occurs if they develop a secondary infection. This can happen when they are scratching and the protective skin membranes of the scalp are broken. If they scratch hard enough, break the skin and bacteria enter the skin, then the possibility of scalp infection exists.