Head Lice Classroom Procedures

When a member of school staff suspects a child is infested with head lice, the following procedures should be followed:

1. The child should be restricted from activities involving close contact (i.e., hugging) or sharing personal items (i.e., hats, clothing, brushes) with other children.

2. The school/facility must be notified, and the parents must be contacted (verbal communication is preferred). **Immediate removal of the child is unnecessary.** If the child has lice, they probably have been infested for weeks and prompt removal of the child could lead to embarrassment and ridicule. The child can be sent home at the **end of the day. Children should be allowed to ride the school bus home.** Transmission via school bus seats is not likely because of the biology of head lice.

3. If 2 or more students are suspected of lice at the same time within the same cohort, a letter should be sent home notifying classmates' parents that a case of head lice is suspected and asking them to check all of their children for head lice. The school should also provide parents with a copy of an information sheet on head lice infestation and treatment options.

4. Whole class screening will only be performed when there is suspicion of multiple infestations. (2 or more symptomatic students)

Tips for Cleaning the School Environment

- ✓ Vacuum all floors, rugs, pillows, carpet squares, and upholstered furniture. There is no need to discard the vacuum bag after cleaning except for aesthetic purposes.
- ✓ Combs and brushes used on an infested individual should be immersed in water hotter than 130°F, Lysol®, rubbing alcohol or a pediculicide for one hour.
- ✓ Play clothing, linens, smocks and cloth toys worn or handled by an infested individual within 2 days before diagnosis should be washed in water hotter than 130°F, or machine dried at the highest heat setting for at least 30 minutes.
- ✓ Other articles may be dry-cleaned or sealed in a plastic bag for at least 14 days at room temperature or 24 hours in below freezing temperatures.
- ✓ It is **not** necessary to hire an exterminator.
- ✓ **Spraying or fogging schools with insecticides or pediculicides is NOT RECOMMENDED, and may be harmful if used in a poorly ventilated area.**

Transmission

It is important to note that head lice are not long-distance travelers, and they are poorly adapted to life away from the host. Although adept at moving from hair to hair, they cannot jump nor can they crawl great distances (from the floor to someone's head, for example) to re-establish. Head lice move from person to person primarily by direct hair-to-hair contact, and less frequently through shared combs, brushes, hats, etc. Head lice may also be transmitted through shared bedding (e.g., pillow cases). Transmission usually involves the active stages (nymph or adult) of the louse and requires the transfer of at least one viable, fertilized female or one of each sex for re-infestation. Active stages cannot survive for more than a few days away from the host. A nymph or adult louse that falls from the host will perish within a few days under the most optimal conditions (low temperature and high humidity). **Under normal conditions, the survival time is most likely measured in hours**. This is because the louse is very susceptible to dehydration and will rapidly starve if removed from a blood source. Eggs can survive longer off-host periods (a week or more), but the hatched nymph must come in contact with human head hair almost immediately or it will perish. Louse eggs also do not hatch at normal room temperatures; they require the higher temperatures associated with mammalian bodies. Lice are very host-specific, and will not survive/proliferate on pets – you cannot get lice from your dog or cat.

All of this suggests that efforts to control head lice should be concentrated on removing/killing lice on the host.