

St. Michael's Episcopal Day School Head Lice (Pediculosis) Policy

St. Michael's School follows current guidance from the California Department of Public Health (CDPH), the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) regarding the management of head lice.

Current public health recommendations do not support “no-nit” policies or routine exclusion of students for head lice or nits alone. By the time head lice are identified, infestation has often been present for several weeks, and exclusion from school provides little public health benefit while potentially increasing stigma and disrupting learning.

Philosophy

Our core value of compassion guides our approach. Head lice are a common, non-dangerous condition that can affect any child or family and are not related to hygiene or cleanliness. While head lice do not transmit disease, they do require treatment.

The school responds to head lice with care, discretion, and respect for student dignity. Student privacy is strictly protected, and the identity of affected students is never disclosed. Families are asked to avoid speculation or rumor, which can contribute to stigma and anxiety.

Transmission and Family Responsibility

Head lice spread primarily through direct head-to-head contact. They do not jump or fly and cannot survive for long away from the human scalp. Head lice survive best on the human scalp and generally do not remain viable for long once separated from a human host. As a result, transmission through environmental surfaces such as classroom furniture or materials is uncommon.

Additionally, because head lice are often present for weeks before being detected and are frequently transmitted outside of school, identifying the source of an infestation is usually not possible.

For these reasons, the most effective strategy for preventing and identifying head lice is regular home monitoring by parents and guardians. Families are responsible for periodic head checks and prompt treatment when lice are suspected or identified.

Notification

If a student is found to have **live** head lice at school, the parent or guardian will be notified and the student will be referred for treatment at the end of the school day.

Students are generally permitted to remain in school for the remainder of the day. At the parent or guardian's discretion, the student may be picked up early for treatment.

Families may be notified when the school identifies a pattern of head lice cases within a classroom or when broader communication is otherwise determined to be necessary based on direct reported cases from parents/guardians and not hearsay.

These notifications are informational only and are intended to support monitoring and early identification. Student identities are never disclosed.

Return to School

Following treatment, students may return to school the next day. The School does not enforce a "no-nit" policy, and the presence of nits alone will not be grounds for exclusion from school.

If live lice or signs of active infestation are observed after treatment, the parent or caregiver will be contacted for follow-up guidance, and additional treatment may be recommended.

Screening

At the discretion of school administration or the school nurse, siblings and other individuals with close head-to-head contact with a confirmed case of live lice may be inspected and referred for evaluation, monitoring, or treatment as appropriate.

Routine classroom-wide or school-wide head lice screenings are not recommended by current public health authorities and will not be conducted as a regular practice. Mass screenings are not cost-effective, do not reduce the incidence or transmission of head lice, and may contribute to misdiagnosis, stigma, anxiety, and unnecessary absenteeism. Research has not demonstrated that routine school-based screenings reduce head lice occurrence.

In addition, screenings may also create a false sense of reassurance, as early infestations and newly hatched lice (nymphs) can be difficult to detect during a single examination. Because infestations may develop between screenings, ongoing monitoring at home by parents or guardians remains the most effective method for early identification and timely treatment.

Lastly, school-wide screenings require significant time and resources and may disrupt instruction and the educational environment, diverting attention from other essential health, educational, and student support responsibilities. For these reasons, St. Michael's prioritizes parent education and routine home monitoring rather than mass screening practices.

School Authority

While the school generally follows a non-exclusion approach consistent with public health guidance, it retains discretion to take additional action when necessary.

This may include exclusion, required treatment, or medical clearance in cases involving:

- Severe or persistent infestation with **live** lice;
- Repeated or ongoing reinfestation after notification;
- Concerns regarding inadequate treatment follow-through; or
- Other circumstances impacting student health or the school environment.

Final determinations regarding attendance and return to school rest with school administration.

References

American Academy of Pediatrics. (2021). *Head lice*. In D. W. Kimberlin, M. T. Brady, M. A. Jackson, & S. S. Long (Eds.), *Red book: 2021–2024 report of the Committee on Infectious Diseases* (32nd ed.). American Academy of Pediatrics.

California Department of Public Health, Division of Communicable Disease Control. (2024). *Guidance on head lice prevention and control for K–12 schools and child care facilities*.
<https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/CDPH%20Document%20Library/SchoolGuidanceonHeadLice.pdf>

California School Nurses Organization. (2022). *Pediculosis management in schools (position statement)*. <https://csno.memberclicks.net/position-statements>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (n.d.). *Head lice*.
<https://www.cdc.gov/lice/about/head-lice.html>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (n.d.). *Head lice: Prevention and control*.
<https://www.cdc.gov/lice/prevention/index.html>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (n.d.). *Head lice: Treatment*.
<https://www.cdc.gov/lice/treatment/index.html>

National Association of School Nurses. (2022). *Pediculosis management in the school setting (position statement)*.
<https://www.nasn.org/nasn-resources/professional-practice-documents/position-statements>

HealthyChildren.org (American Academy of Pediatrics). (n.d.). *Head lice: Signs, symptoms, and treatment*.
<https://www.healthychildren.org/English/health-issues/conditions/from-insects-animals/Pages/Signs-of-Lice.aspx>