

Head Lice and Nits Information and Procedures

Head lice are the cause of embarrassment, misunderstanding and unnecessary days lost from school and work. The American Academy of Pediatrics, National Association of School Nurses, Center for Disease Control and the PA Department of Health maintain that head lice are not a health hazard, not a sign of uncleanness, and not responsible for the spread of any disease. Marple Newtown School District Certified School Nurses reviewed the District's head lice practice. Based on current research and clinical reports, MNSD has updated its guidelines for managing nits and lice within the school setting.

Our goals are as follows:

- Minimize school absenteeism
- Contain infestations
- Provide health information for treatment and prevention
- Prevent overexposure to potentially hazardous chemicals.

Important things to know:

- The management of nits and head lice should not disrupt the educational process.
- A student with live lice will be sent home for treatment. A student may return to school as soon as possible after treatment if s/he has no live lice and has been judged not contagious by the school nurse or a physician.
- A student with nits can remain in or return to school if judged not contagious by the nurse or a physician. The school nurse may exclude a child with repeated infestations or an active infestation with an apparent lack of adequate follow through.
- Any student who was most likely to have had direct head-to-head contact with a student with live lice will be screened, but classroom wide or school wide screening is not merited. Please refer to the National Association of School Nurses Position Statement on Head Lice for further details. www.nasn.org.
- A letter will be sent home to parents when live lice are found in their child's classroom.

Information about nits/eggs:

- They are attached to the hair shaft with a waterproof glue-like substance.
- Nits themselves are not contagious.
- Nits by themselves without the presence of live lice do not indicate an active infestation. Studies by the AAP and PA DOH found that having 5 or more nits within ¼" of the scalp is a risk factor for nits hatching into live lice.
- If nits are found more than ¼" from the scalp and no live lice are found, the infestation is probably an old one and does not need to be treated. These nits are usually dead or empty and will not hatch but will instead fall off the head.

Symptoms of Head Lice:

- Itching, tickling feeling of something crawling in the hair
- Scratch marks or red bite marks behind ears or back of the neck
- Irritability and sleeplessness because head lice are active at night.

How to check for head lice:

- Seat your child in a brightly lit room where you can easily examine the head.
- Part the hair and closely examine the scalp and every strand of hair, especially at the back of the neck, behind the ears and the crown.

- Look for small white or tan specks about the size of a poppy seed that are attached to the hair shaft near the scalp. You may also see actual lice moving away from the light.
- To tell the difference between eggs and dandruff, try to remove them from the hair shaft. If they are not easily removed, they are probably eggs, also called nits.

Steps to treat head lice:

- Check every member of the family.
- Treat family members who have head lice with a lice-killing product. Products are available at stores that carry hair care products. Ask a pharmacist or your child's health care provider if you need help in choosing or locating a product.
- It is important to follow the label directions on the product EXACTLY.
- Remove lice and nits with either a lice comb or by picking them out.

The child must come to the nurse's office to be checked for live lice prior to returning to class.

Steps to treat the home:

- Wash pillows, bed linens, towels, hats, schoolbags and clothing that the individual has used in hot water – at least 130 degrees.
- Place items in the dryer at the hottest setting for at least 20 minutes.
- Dry clean items that cannot be washed.
- Place items that cannot be cleaned or run through the dryer (stuffed animals and toys) in a tightly sealed plastic bag for 10-14 days.
- Soak combs, brushes, hair clips, headbands in hot water (130 degrees) for 20 minutes.
- Vacuum the entire house including rugs, furniture, floors, mattresses, car and car seats to get rid of any hairs that may have nits attached.
- Do not spray pesticides in your home because they can expose your family to dangerous chemicals. They can also be a trigger for people with breathing conditions such as asthma.

Key Points about head lice:

- Anyone can get head lice
- Lice require blood to live
- Lice crawl very quickly. They do not jump, fly or hop. Lice do not have wings
- Lice are spread through direct contact, mainly head to head contact. School transmission is considered rare.
- Secondary transmission can occur through sharing personal items such as hats, scarves, helmets, brushes, combs, hair clips and pillows.
- Pets CANNOT get or spread human head lice
- It is a good idea to check your child's head weekly for any signs of lice or nits.
- Check your child's head if he/she has spent the night away from home.

Will students be excluded for head lice or nits?

- Students with lice will be sent home for treatment.
- Students with lice will be checked by the school nurse before returning to school.
- Students with an infestation of nits should receive appropriate treatment at home as soon as possible.
- Because no disease process is associated with head lice, schools are not advised to exclude students when nits remain after appropriate lice treatment.

What happens when a child is found to have lice?

Studies by the AAP and CDC indicate that screening for live lice has not been proven to have a significant effect on the incidence of head lice in a school community. However, individual students who were most likely to have had direct head-to-head contact with the student with live lice will be checked. A child found with live head lice will be referred to his/her parent/guardian for treatment. The classroom rugs in that child's classroom will be thoroughly vacuumed. A letter will be sent to parents/guardians in the child's classroom.

What happens when a child is found to have nits?

It is recommended that students having 5 or more nits within 1/4" of the scalp be treated as soon as possible. Studies by the AAP and CDC indicate that widespread screening for nits is not an accurate way for predicting which children will become infested, and screening for live lice has not been proven to have a significant effect on the incidence of head lice in a school community.

Resources:

<http://aappolicy.aappublications.org/cgi/reprint/pediatrics;110/3/638.pdf>

<http://www.cdc.gov/lice/head/>

<http://www.portal.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt/community/schools/14130>

<http://www.nasn.org>