

Head Lice

Evidence Based Management In the School Setting



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Adapted:

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Objectives: After this presentation, school staff and parents will:

- Identify facts about head lice
- Describe management of possible head lice infestation in the classroom according to RUSD Policy

Head Lice: Historical Perspective

- Lice have been our companions since ancient times and have so befriended us that they can't live without us.
- Lice likely co-evolved with people; claws are well adapted to grasping the hair shaft. They don't jump or fly.
- Lice are host specific parasites so human lice don't live on other animals.
- Lice must feed off scalp, so they die within 24 hours of separation from human hosts; if they have fallen off hair, they are at the end of the life cycle.

Head Lice: What are they?

- A head louse is an insect that lives on the human scalp and feeds on blood.
- Head lice hatch from small eggs (nits) that are attached with a cement-like substance to the shaft of individual hairs.
- Eggs hatch in about 10 days. Once hatched the head louse matures in less than 2 weeks.
- Female head lice may survive for as much as a month (most seem to perish sooner). Those more than about 2 weeks old increasingly become geriatric and tend to produce fewer eggs and less viable eggs. If nits are present, head lice have already been there but may be long gone.

Head Lice: What are they (cont'd)?

- Rarely more than 12 live lice on head at one time.
- Most head louse infestations seem to cause little, if any, direct harm.
- Head lice are not known to naturally transmit microbes that cause disease.
- The greatest harm associated with head lice results from the well-intentioned but misguided use of caustic or toxic substances to eliminate the lice.
- Traditional pediculicides and alternative formulations or methods are frequently over-applied.

Head Lice: How do we get them?

- **The most common means of transmission is through physical/direct (head to head) contact!!**
- Indirect transmission is uncommon but may occur via *shared* combs, brushes, hats, and hair accessories that have been in contact with an infested person.
- Rarely, through *shared* helmets – don't live on helmets alone.
- Schools are **not** a common source of transmission.
- Lice are not caused by poor hygiene. Infest all socio-economic groups.

Harvard Scheme for Managing Presumed Head Louse Infestations in Schools

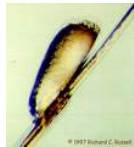
Nits Discovered on hair?

Yes

No



Do nothing



Inspect hair for live lice;

May be examined via microscope

Reinspect in 7-10 school days

Harvard Scheme for Managing Presumed Head Louse Infestations in Schools 2

Live (crawling) lice on hair?

Yes No  Reinspect in 7-10 days



1. Notify parent/guardian immediately and encourage to pick up the child from school before **the end of the day if possible; recommend that they call their physician for recommendations to treat head lice**
2. Provide information on head lice and methods to eliminate infestation

Harvard Scheme for Managing Presumed Head Louse Infestations in Schools 3

UNJUSTIFIED RESPONSES TO LIVE LICE

- **Exclusion or quarantine**
- **Notification of classmates parents**
- **Classroom or schoolwide screenings**
- **Insecticide treatments to the school environment**
- **Bagging of clothes, toys, etc.**
- **Vacuuming; boiling linens; laundering *all* linens**
- **Restricting use of headphones, equipment (helmets)**
- **Reporting to CPS in absence of other indicators**

What staff need to know in response

- **Creating unnecessary panic in the school community is a disservice to students.**
- **We need to *educate* students, families, and ourselves based on fact and not fear.**
- **Don't let head lice interfere with students' opportunities to learn and achieve *in the classroom*. Missing school puts a child at risk for failure.**

RUSD POLICY

- To better manage and to limit the spread of head lice infestations, school employees shall report all suspected cases of head lice to the school nurse or designee (*trained by the nurse*). The school nurse or designee shall examine the student. An infestation shall be determined by looking closely through the hair and scalp for viable nits or live lice.
- If nits are found but there are no live (crawling) lice on the hair, the school nurse (designee) will notify the parent to reinspect their child's hair within 7-10 school days.

RUSD POLICY cont'd



- If live (crawling) lice are found on the hair, the parent/guardian shall be notified immediately or by the end of the day via phone, email, and/or a note sent home with the student. The parent/guardian shall be provided information on the biology of head lice, methods to eliminate infestation, and directions to examine household contacts for lice and nits. The school nurse or designee **may** notify parents/guardians **in the affected classroom** to encourage them to check their children and to treat, if appropriate, and/or **may** examine other students most likely to have had direct head to head contact with the affected student.

RUSD POLICY

cont'd

- **Parents/guardians will be encouraged to verify treatment as soon as possible after notification.**
- ***If the parent/guardian is unable to afford treatment, the student will be referred to the school nurse.***
- **Students shall be discouraged from direct head to head contact with other students. The nurse or designee shall provide in-service education to staff regarding how to handle nits and/or head lice in the classroom.**
- **Information about head lice shall be sent home to all parents/guardians at the beginning of the school year.**
- **Staff shall maintain the privacy of students identified as having head lice.**

Verifying infestation



Pseudo nit

- Even if an experienced person checks for lice, they may be misdiagnosed.
- To reduce anxiety as we educate, testing for suspected nits or lice can be confirmed via microscope.

Putting lice in perspective

- Historically policy for School Districts were “No Nits” resulting in:
 - Negative consequences on student attendance as policy excluded students;
 - Effectiveness of a “no nit” policy does not limit transmission;
 - Is not a reportable disease (CDC 2006);
 - American Academy of Pediatrics, American Academy of Dermatology, and Center for Disease Control recommend change in exclusion policy.

Resources

- Harvard School of Public Health <http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/headlice.html>
- Journal of School Nursing, Vol. 25, No. 6. December 2009, 407-416, “A Policy Change Strategy for Head Lice Management”
- California Department of Health Services, Infectious Disease Branch <http://www.cdph.ca.gov/HealthInfo/discond/Documents/2009SchoolGuidelinesonHeadLice.pdf>

Resources

- New England Journal of Medicine, Vol. 346, No 21, May 23, 2002, “Head Lice” RJ Roberts <http://www.aappolicy.aappublications.org/cgi/reprint/pediatrics;110/3/638.pdf>
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Parasitic Disease Information, Head Lice: <http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dph/parasites/lice>
<http://www.cdc.gov/lice/head/schools.html>