

Williamsport Area School District
Office of Student Services
Dept. of School Health Services

Dear Parent,

Every year, many children throughout the United States become infected with head lice. Head lice will always be part of our society. Since there are many misconceptions about head lice, we are attempting to provide you with the most accurate, scientific information available. If you would like additional information, there are additional references below or you may contact the school nurse.

What are Head Lice? Head lice are tiny wingless insects that are about the size of a sesame seed. They have six legs with claws on each leg. Since they do not have hind legs, they cannot jump or hop. Although they are able to crawl quickly, they are unable to cover great distances.³

The female louse may live for 30 days and lays approximately 10 eggs (nits) per day. The eggs are attached to the hair by a glue-like substance. The head from the human body incubates the eggs, which will hatch in 10-14 days. Once hatched, the nymph grows for 9-12 days, mates and lays eggs. Untreated, this cycle will repeat itself every three weeks.² For pictures of head lice, please visit the website <http://identify.us.com/head-lice/index.html>.

Medical Implications: Head lice are an infestation, not an infection. Head lice do not cause or spread any diseases and therefore, do not pose any significant threat to one's health.

Societal Reactions: Head lice will always be present in the community at any given time. For years, the mere mention of lice caused people to react negatively. Research regarding head lice did not exist. Instead, myths were developed and spread from one generation to the next. Well meaning individuals have communicated myths (which have no scientific basis) to others and this has resulted in many misconceptions about head lice. Fortunately, with research, many past practices and myths can now be abolished. Instead of seeking for the source or someone to blame, parents, schools and communities need to work together to incorporate the most appropriate recommendations that are based on the latest scientific research.

Prevention/ Early Detection: Prevention of head lice is best attainable through education. Parents and school staff need to educate children to avoid sharing hats, combs, brushes, scarves and avoid direct head to head contact.

Home Control Measures: At least twice a week, parents should check their children's heads. This will provide parents the opportunity to talk to their children about head lice and allow parents to detect any early infestation.

School Control Measures: Currently, there is no scientific evidence that indicates that mass screenings are effective in reducing head lice transmission. Research studies recommend that schools provide families with information on head lice.^{1,2,3,4}

What should parents do when head lice are discovered?

1. **Don't panic.** Remember, head lice do not cause any diseases.
2. Seek assistance from your physician, PA Department of Health or the school nurse and follow their instructions. Lice are easily treated if ALL instructions are followed carefully.
 - a. Apply a special medicated shampoo or crème rinse, which can be purchased at the drug store.

- b. Apply the shampoo/crème rinse according to the directions on the bottle. Do **not** use on eyebrows or eyelashes.
- c. Wait the specified length of time for the shampoo to be effective and then wash the hair thoroughly with warm water and regular shampoo. If using crème rinse, follow directions on the bottle.
- d. Using a fine toothed steel comb, comb the infested area to assist in the removal of the dead lice and eggs (nits). In some cases, you may need to use your fingernails to rid the hair of nits. It is best to be free of all nits.
- e. Inspection for and treatment of head lice should be carried out with a light shining directly on the hair.
- f. As treatment can be accomplished in an afternoon or evening, children should return to school the next day.
- g. All bedding, clothing, towels, etc. should be washed in hot water (130°F) with detergent and machined dried.
- h. Special sprays, available in drug stores, are not necessary. Simple vacuuming of these areas is also effective, provided they are vacuumed thoroughly. **(DO NOT SPRAY PEOPLE, ANIMALS OR UNDER CLOTHING.)**
- i. Lice do not hide in wall crevice or floor cracks. Treatment of these areas is useless.
- j. Bag any unwashable items for 10 days.

Please do not spend any energy on trying to locate the source of your child's infestation. It is virtually impossible to identify the exact source. Your time and energy should be used to treat and educate your child.

Reinfestation: Currently, there are no products that are 100% effective in killing all of the nits. There are several measures that can be done to keep lice from coming back.^{1,3}

To Keep Lice from Coming Back:

- ✓ Inspect all family members periodically for any new lice infestation. It is especially important to check hair every day for two weeks after lice have been found and initially treated.
- ✓ After the first shampoo, re-wash the hair with the special medicated shampoo after 9-10 days to insure adequate treatment. If using crème rinse, follow directions on the bottle. Do not re-treat before the 9 days.
- ✓ Instruct your child not to borrow personal items such as combs, brushes, hats, clothing and towels from other people.
- ✓ Disinfect combs, brushes and similar items by washing with the special shampoo.¹

Note: If searching the web, please beware of sites that contain nonscientific recommendations. Trusted websites include the following:

<http://identify.us.com/head-lice/index.html>

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

References:

¹Burgess, Ian: Pollack, R & Taplin, D. Cutting Through Controversy: Special Report on the Treatment of Headlice, 2003; 3-13

²Frankowski, Barbara L. and Leonard Weiner. Headlice Pediatrics, 2002 110 (3) 638-642.

³Pollard, Richard J. HeadLice Information. Harvard School of Public Health. 1-15