

## Facts About Head Lice

In an effort to minimize the number of cases of lice and impact it has on families, we are offering some helpful information to all parents to know what to be on the lookout for at home.

Lice are a parasite that often seeks shelter in cold weather on warm heads. It is a myth that they are only found or start in children/homes with poor hygiene; lice are equal opportunity bugs. They are not harmful in the medical sense, but do require significant attention to get rid of if found. At this time we feel that the burden is placed on families when it spreads is great enough to warrant not having students at school with live lice or nits. It also requires special efforts by the school to make sure classrooms where it is found are treated properly. Please call the school office if your child has lice or has been treated for lice at home.

Live lice are 2-3mm long and brown to black in color. They look similar to fruit flies, but can be even smaller and do not fly or jump. They are generally found on the scalp or hair near the scalp. Live lice lay eggs called nits. Nits can be so small they are hard to see, but are generally white/yellow/light tan in color and can be distinguished from dandruff because they cling to hairs they are on as opposed to falling off as you move hair. Nits are also generally found near the scalp on the hair. While beginning nits can be difficult to see, as they grow they will resemble something just smaller than a sesame seed. It takes about 7-10 days for nits to hatch which is why we recommend that parents continue checking for lice at home for ten days if your child has had head lice. We will also check students returning to school for head lice. There are many website photos of nits and lice out there that also may help you know what to be on the lookout for at home.

If your child has head lice, several over-the-counter lice treatments are available as well as prescription strength treatments from physicians, although these are generally more expensive. Going through the hair in very small sections with the comb provided will help remove nits. You may have to do this more than once until all nits are gone and then continue checking for ten days afterward. Again, nits can be very small and are easily missed. It's not uncommon for a parent to miss one or two that a school finds or a parent to find one or two that a school missed after a head check as it's impossible to check every individual hair. This is why it's important that we work together.

Most importantly, please know that we do our very best to protect your child's feelings if they are found to have head lice. Children (and parents) should feel no shame in having head lice. The health department does require us to report the number of cases, but we never disclose any names to either the health department or to other parents.

**The best way to prevent transmission:**

- Teach your child not to share combs, brushes, hair ornaments, hats, caps, scarves, headsets or other personal headgear.
- Do not try on other people's hats.
- Teach your child to place hats and scarves inside the pockets or sleeves.
- Clean or disinfect shared headgear (such as helmets).
- Conduct regular head checks of your child.

**The Northwest Michigan Community Health Agency recommends the following for treatment:**

- Check all family members and close contacts for infestation.
- Treat all family members and close contacts at the same time that they are found to be infested. Retreat family members as needed.
- Do not treat someone who does not have live lice (or nits close to the head). Do not use any form of lice treatment products as a prevention method to avoid lice.
- Change and launder all bedding and clothing used in the last 72 hours. This includes clothing, pillowcases, sheets, night clothes, towels and stuffed animals.
- Combs, brushes, hats, and other hair accessories in contact with an infected person should be washed in hot water (130 degrees Fahrenheit) each day to dislodge nits and lice, or soak in Lysol or rubbing alcohol.
- A routine vacuuming of floors and furnishings is suggested.
- Use the hot dryer cycle of your laundry machine for 20 minutes.
- Place non-washable items in a sealed plastic bag for 14 days or in freezing weather for 12-24 hours.
- Prevent over aggressive treatment and scratching which can lead to secondary infections and other complications.
- Check, comb, and remove nits and lice every 2-3 days following treatment.
- Retreat in 7-10 days.
- Check all treated persons for 2-3 weeks to ensure all lice and nits are gone.