

## Notes From The Howell School Nurses

### Lousy Lice

Lice have been around for a very long time and will stay around for a very long time. Head lice are small parasitic insects that are adapted to living on the scalp and neck hairs of their human host. Although these insects cannot hop, jump or fly, they are easily transmitted from one child to another by head to head contact, or sharing hats, brushes, and combs. They are not a sign of poor hygiene. Lice seem to prefer clean hair and are just as likely to spread through upscale communities. School is not the only place your child might be in contact with head lice. Preschools, gymnastics, movie theaters, airplanes, and sports activities are some opportunistic environments just to name a few.

#### **What to look for:**

Lice are small insects about the size of a sesame seed. They are usually grayish-tan but vary in color. They move quickly and shy away from light, making them difficult to see. Diagnosis is more often made on the basis of finding nits or eggs, which can be seen most easily in natural light or under a bright lamp, and with reading glasses or a magnifier. Nits are tiny whitish-gray oval eggs attached to the hair shaft. The female louse cements her eggs to the hair shaft with a waterproof, cement-like substance. Thus, nits can't be washed or brushed off like dandruff. Nits are found throughout the hair, but are most often located at the nape of the neck, behind the ears, and at the crown.

#### **Symptoms of infestation:**

The itching that occurs when lice bite and suck blood from the scalp is often the primary symptom of infestation, although not everyone will experience the itching. Children seen scratching their heads should be examined. Often bite or scratch marks can be seen on the scalp, particularly at the nape of the neck.

#### **Treatment:**

Infestation can be treated with a head lice medication, called a pediculicide. There are several types available on the market, and they come in a variety of forms: shampoo, cream rinse, and lotion. Just as important as the medicine is the actual manual removal of the nits from the hair shaft. This task requires diligence, persistence, and patience. Gently comb the child's hair with a nit removal comb, inspecting small segments at a time, and repeat this combing over and over again. It is also advisable to separate the hair strands with your fingers to inspect and remove nits manually in addition to the comb. It is so important to comb out EVERY louse and nit. The medicine kills the lice but not the eggs, and the eggs will

eventually hatch and there will be another infestation. Wash recently worn clothes, bedding, and towels in hot water and dry on hot cycle. Soak combs, brushes, etc. in hot water. To make sure the rest of your home is louse free, you should vacuum carpets, pillows, mattresses, upholstered furniture, even car seats.

**Prevention:**

It is difficult to prevent head lice. You can check your child often to catch a problem early on. Consider pulling long hair back into ponytails or braids. Teach your child not to share combs, brushes, hair accessories, hats, headphones, helmets or scarves.

If your child has head lice, please inform the school nurse so we can work together to minimize the spread. Also, please inform the parents of your child's playmates.

After treatment continue DAILY head checks for nits and live lice for at least 2 weeks and then on a regular basis. Routine head checks are especially encouraged after your child returns from sleepovers, camp outs or sleep away camps.

For further information please check the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website @ [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov). Please contact your school nurse if they can provide you with any other assistance.