

## Head Lice FAQs

While most children will never encounter head lice, and head lice do not transmit disease, head lice continue to cause anxiety in parents of school-aged children. A growing body of new research challenges past practices that are now known to be ineffective. District 719 Health Services encourage parents to visit the sites listed below for educational and non-commercial information.

### **What does the school do about head lice?**

Health office staff notify the parents of a child found to have head lice, request permission to check siblings, recommend treatment (per AAP guidelines), and follow-up until the situation is resolved, ensuring that confidentiality is maintained. Health office staff also notifies custodians/appropriate persons if vacuuming or other program specific cleaning is needed. Teaching staff are provided classroom prevention tips and prevention information to share with students. *Note: herculean cleaning measures, bagging, etc. are no longer routinely recommended, as well as fumigants and insecticides which can be unsafe.*

### **Will the school send head lice notices home?**

Grade level notices regarding head lice will be sent home when it is determined that a student has a confirmed case. The Licensed School Nurses/Public Health Nurses will evaluate the specifics of each situation:

- Preserving the confidentiality of each student/family is mandated.
- Half of head lice cases are misdiagnosed. This results in improper use of head lice products and is causing concern about the unsafe use of these products when no lice are present or when products are used excessively.\*
- It is thought to be more useful to periodically provide information about the diagnosis, treatment and prevention of head lice to families of all children, and to encourage parents to check their children's heads regularly and if the child has symptoms. (\*American Academy of Pediatrics Volume 126 Number 2, August 2010)
- Health Services believe it is in each family's best interests to check their children periodically rather than wait for notification from school. To continue to allow the community to believe notifications are an effective strategy is a disservice as:
  - It can take as much as 4-6 weeks to develop symptoms.
  - Schools are not aware of cases in out-of-school activities (sleep-overs, etc.) where head lice are more likely to be shared.

### **Will the school screen students or classrooms for head lice?**

Classroom or school-wide screening is currently discouraged. Screening for nits alone is not an accurate way of predicting which children are or 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 over time.\* To continue to allow the community to believe screenings are an effective strategy is a disservice to the community.

### **What is the parent's role in dealing with head lice?**

School screenings cannot take the place of more careful parental checks.\* It is the parent's responsibility, as with other conditions, to be aware of their child's needs and seek the necessary care. If information or resource referrals are needed, please contact Health Services or your family health care provider.

**Tips for parents at home:**

- Talk to your child about not sharing personal items such as combs, brushes and hats. However, no one should refuse to wear protective headgear because of fear of head lice.\*
  - Check your child's head before and after sleep-over experiences.
  - Talk to your child about avoiding head-to-head (hair-to-hair) contact during play and other activities at home, school, and elsewhere (sports activities, playground, slumber parties, camp). For example, in some situations a helpful strategy to decrease hair-to-hair contact may be to keep long hair in a ponytail rather than allowing it to hang down.
- 

**The following websites provide more details about lice treatment and management and were used as sources for the above information:**

**\*American Academy of Pediatrics**

<http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/cgi/reprint/126/2/392?maxtoshow=&hits=10&RESULTFORMAT=&fulltext=head+lice&searchid=1&FIRSTINDEX=0&sortspec=relevance&resourcetype=HWCIT>

**Centers for Disease Control and Prevention**

[www.cdc.gov/lice/head/](http://www.cdc.gov/lice/head/)

**Harvard School of Public Health has been moved to:**

<https://identify.us.com/idmybug/head-lice/head-lice-FAQS/index.html>