

What You Need To Know About Head Lice in School

What Are Head Lice?

- Head lice are tiny grey to brown insects about the size of a sesame seed that live in human hair and must feed on human blood to survive.
- They lay tiny white oval-shaped eggs about the size of a knot in a thread, called nits that attach to strands of hair close to the scalp. Although it's hard to see head lice, you can see the nits if you look closely.
- Nits are most often found in the hair behind the ears and at the back of the head and neck. The first sign of lice is itching of the head, which is caused by the bite of the head lice.
- Head lice do not spread disease.

How Do You Get Head Lice?

- Any child can get head lice.
- Head lice happen mostly with elementary school-aged children.
- Children get lice from other children through head to head contact during play or sports or nap time, and most often in school settings.
- Sharing combs, brushes, hair accessories, hats, or lockers can spread head lice.
- You can't spread nits...only live lice.

How Do You Get Rid of Head Lice?

- Use an over-the-counter FDA-approved shampoo treatment found at drug and grocery stores. Follow directions on package exactly.
- Soak all combs and brushes in very hot water for about 1 hour.
- Wash sheets, blankets and other bedding in hot water.
- Seal stuffed animals in a plastic bag for 1 week.
- Vacuum carpets, furniture and mattresses thoroughly.
- Re-treat hair again in 7 days.

If You Suspect a Child in Your Classroom Has Lice

- Have the child checked by the school nurse
- Follow your school/district policies regarding head lice
- Educate children on avoiding activities that may spread head lice...remind them not to share combs, brushes, hair accessories, headphones, hats, clothing, bedding, etc.

The Law

There is no statute in Texas that addresses excluding children with head lice from school. DSHS does not have authority to impose a set policy regarding head lice on districts. DSHS does, however, urge school districts to ensure that its policy does not cause children to miss class unnecessarily or encourage the embarrassment and isolation of students who suffer from repeated head lice infestations.

Lice are not a public health threat, they do not carry disease. Therefore, the Department of State Health Services does not monitor or track cases of head lice. It is up to each school district to create head lice policies if they so choose and some do. Talk to the school nurse or someone else in charge to find out what the school policy is in your district. Refer to the topic "Setting Policies for Schools" that appears on this page for policy suggestions.

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) states from a 2010 research study on head lice, the number one key point in the study: *"No healthy child should be excluded from or allowed to miss school time because of head lice. No-nit policies for return to school should be abandoned."* Information for schools is located at the end of the study article. (*Pediatrics* Vol. 126 No. 2 August 1, 2010 pp. 392 -403)

<http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/126/2/392.full?sid=10e25e1b-8146-470b-8c0a-3c3cc16460ec>

Setting Policies for School

When developing district policy about head lice control here are some issues and topics you may want to consider:

There is no law that addresses headlice; the school or district can create there own guidelines by developing written policies that:

- Facilitate efficient and consistent implementation by all campuses
- Protect school nurses, teachers and other school staff
- Create peace of mind for administrators and parents
- Ensure all children are treated in a fair and equitable manner

Policy should be a joint effort with your School Health Advisory Council, local health care providers, district administrators, school nurses, parents and other stakeholders.

When developing policy, consider the following:

1. **Screening procedures** – staying away from unwarranted mass screenings that disrupt student and teacher class time and take away from the nurses’ ability to address the needs of the more physically or mentally disabled student (Check the AAP study on head lice for [school] Screenings for guidance: <http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/126/2/392.full?sid=10e25e1b-8146-470b-8c0a-3c3cc16460ec>)
2. **Parent/Guardian Notification** – including a lice information fact sheet or brochure with the student handbook at the beginning of the year and notification when there is an infestation confined to a specific classroom (Check the AAP study on head lice for Management on the Day of Diagnosis for guidance: <http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/126/2/392.full?sid=10e25e1b-8146-470b-8c0a-3c3cc16460ec>)
3. **Exclusion Protocol** – including what happens if the parent is not home (Check the AAP study on head lice for Management on the Day of Diagnosis for guidance: <http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/126/2/392.full?sid=10e25e1b-8146-470b-8c0a-3c3cc16460ec>)
4. **Readmission criteria** – consider stating they should use an FDA-approved, medicated treatment. (Check the readmission criteria stated in the AAP study on head lice, noted above, for guidance: <http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/126/2/392.full?sid=10e25e1b-8146-470b-8c0a-3c3cc16460ec>)
5. **Definition of and district response to excessive absences** – may help address issue of parents who can’t keep their children free of lice. [Texas Education Agency](#) has criteria for excessive absences.

You may also want to address the following:

1. How the school/district may want to address those families that cannot afford to pay for the treatment to rid their child of lice.
2. Care in the classroom to prevent the spread of head lice.
3. Inservice training for school staff.

Resources

<http://www.dshs.state.tx.us/schoolhealth/lice.shtm>

www.cdc.gov/lice/