

Dear Parents,

The following information is from the Iowa Department of Health and its purpose is to acquaint you with the nature of the problem and proper care and treatment of head lice. To help control cases of head lice in school, please inform the school nurse or the secretary if your child has head lice. This information is treated confidentially. After treatment, your child may return to school.

How you get head lice: one or more of the following ways usually transmits head lice:

- through close personal contact with another infested individual or through the use of common combs, brushes, and other grooming aids
- through sharing of hats, caps or coats
- through commingling of these items at school, church, or other public areas.

Some people have the impression that people that are unclean are the only ones to get head lice. This is not true. Frequent bathing will neither prevent head lice, nor eliminate an infestation once it has become established.

What to look for: Head lice are elongated insects about this (-) long and are grayish – white to dark brown. Lice do not have wings, so they cannot fly. They do not jump, but they do crawl quickly, which makes them difficult to find in a child's hair. Lice **do not** carry diseases.

Since the actual lice are hard to find, the diagnosis of head lice is primarily made on the basis of finding nits. A nit is a louse egg. Nits are teardrop in shape, about this (') size, and vary in color from brown to white. An adult louse will attach a nit to a hair shaft with a waterproof, cement-like substance. Thus, nits cannot be washed or brushed out of the hair like dandruff or other debris that may look like nits to the naked eye. Clusters of nits may be found in any section of hair, but a careful examination of the entire scalp is necessary to detect them. The areas that the nits are usually the most prevalent are the napes of the neck and around the ears, so take special care in examining these areas.

Individual treatment:

1. Apply head louse shampoo to dry hair until hair is saturated according to the label's instructions. Several medicated shampoos such as Rid or Nix are available over the counter. However, it is felt that some lice are becoming resistant to some shampoo formulas; therefore **daily examination and combing are essential** for at least 2 weeks after treatment of lice.
2. Rinse out or remove product according to instructions. While hair is still wet, comb out dead lice and nits with a fine-tooth comb designed for this purpose. Combing out the nits, while it's a painstaking task, will greatly reduce the probability of lice hatching and reinfestation. While the shampoo may kill some of the nits, **daily combing** the nits out of the hair is the only way to insure eggs can't hatch.
3. Have your child put on clean clothing after treatment and combing.
4. Repeat shampoo treatment in 7 days as this is how long it would take any nits to hatch and new lice to be present.
5. All family members and close friends of your child should be examined. Family members who have evidence of infestation should be treated as well as anyone who shares a bed with the known infested person, whether or not there is evidence of lice present.

Decontamination of personal articles and environment:

- Treat all of these personal articles of an infested individual: coats, caps, headbands, brushes, towels, sheets, mattress pads, pillows, and stuffed animals by using heat. Heat is lethal to lice and their eggs so many of these things may be laundered in hot water (125 degrees F) and dried using the HOT setting on your dryer. Home hot water heaters keep water at 130 degrees F when set at medium or high. Allow time between loads of laundry or baths to let the water heater to keep up. If total reliance is placed on the clothes dryer for disinfection, dry articles for at least 20 minutes at the HIGH HEAT SETTING. Brushes and combs should also be treated in very hot water for about 10 minutes.
- Environmental spraying of the home environment is probably of limited value. HOWEVER, if more than one child in a family is infested, it may be wise to spray the upholstered furniture and mattresses/pillows.
- Vacuum the mattress, carpets, and cloth upholstered furniture and car seats. Place any articles that can't be laundered in sealed plastic bags for at least 2 weeks.

A Special word about Nits:

Nits (louse eggs) are laid on the hair shaft close to the scalp. This provides the right temperature and moisture to incubate and hatch the eggs. All pediculicide manufacturers state their products will kill eggs, but this has not been found to be true in community studies. The IA Department of Health recommends 2 treatments spaced 7-9 days apart to insure effective control in the event any eggs developed and hatched. Spacing treatments closer than 7 days will not be of value unless there is apparent reinfestation. Parents are encouraged to comb out all the nits they see every day. After treatment the nits will still be attached to the hair and that is why **combing them out is so important**.

The Golden Rule:

Speak to your child about the fact that head lice are something that you catch from another person similar to how you catch a cold. Children who have head lice can't help it and don't deserve to be mistreated by their peers or others.

If you have any questions, please call the school office and ask to talk to the school nurse.