

Ledyard Public Schools
Head Lice Protocol & Guidelines for Schools

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Understanding Head Lice

What are head lice?

Head lice are tiny, wingless, tan/brown insects that live and breed in human hair. They are about the size of a sesame seed. The eggs, called nits, are easier to see than the lice themselves. The nits are yellowish-white, teardrop shaped, and are firmly attached at an angle to the hair shaft close to the scalp behind the ears and on the back of the neck. Dandruff, lint, and hair spray globules can easily be brushed from hair and can be mistaken for nits. Unlike dandruff, nits are difficult to remove and cannot be brushed away. Lice crawl slowly and cannot crawl long distances. **They do not fly, hop, or jump.** They survive by piercing the skin to feed on blood. Skin irritation at the feeding site causes itching. While head lice is a nuisance it does not pose a significant health hazard and they are not known to spread disease.

How do lice spread?

Lice are primarily spread by direct hair-to-hair contact, and less frequently through shared items such as combs, brushes, scarves, hats, headphones, sleeping bags, and stuffed animals. Lice may also be transmitted through shared bedding such as pillows, pillowcases, sheets, and blankets. Lice cannot survive away from the head for more than 24-48 hours. However, the nits can survive off the body for a week or more but, in order to survive, they must get back on the head soon after they hatch. You cannot catch head lice from, or give them to pets.

How do you prevent head lice?

Teach children not to share combs, brushes, hats, and coats. Do not try on other people's hats (not even in department stores). Teach children to hang coats separately – placing hats and scarves inside coat sleeves. Check your child's hair if he/she itches or complains about itching. Getting rid of lice as soon as they are found can prevent them from spreading in your home.

How are lice detected?

The first clue that a child has head lice is frequent scratching of the scalp. To check for infestation, carefully examine the hair around the back of the neck and behind the ears. Since head lice shy away from light, you may only see the eggs (nits), small whitish ovals of uniform size (teardrop shape) attached to the hair shaft.

How are lice treated?

Successful treatment needs to concentrate on removing/killing lice on the child and on the removal of the nits.

Several products are available to treat head lice. These are either shampoos or cream rinses. Some can be purchased over-the-counter while others need a prescription. These shampoos and rinses should not be used on infants because the medicine is ☒

