

# Head Lice Protocol

Head lice infestation is an easily-treated condition that is not associated with any serious medical compThis letter will acquaint you with the nature of this infestation and what should be done to get rid of it.

**Head lice are transmitted through close personal contact with an infested individual.** Transmission can also occur by sharing combs, brushes, hats, or coats, or through co-mingling of these items at the homes of friends, at school, at church, or other public places. Many parents have the impression that only persons who are unclean become infested with head lice. This is **not** true! Frequent bathing will neither prevent head lice nor eliminate an infestation once it becomes established.

Head lice are *insects* about 1/8" long and are gray-to-brown in color. **Lice do not jump, fly, or stay alive for long periods off the human head.** They do move very quickly once on the head and are difficult to find.

Because head lice are good at hiding in the hair, an infestation is usually diagnosed by finding nits. A nit is a louse egg. *Nits* are teardrop-shaped and vary in color from brown to white.

Head lice attach each nit to a hair shaft with a waterproof, cement-like substance. Thus, nits cannot be washed out 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 when there are only a few lice present, a careful examination of the hair and entire scalp may be necessary to detect them.

It is necessary to treat the infested individual and his/her contacts if they are found to be infestThe following treatment procedure should be carried out before the student can return to school:

1. Obtain a medicated product (pediculocide) for treating head lice from your private physician or an over-the-counter lice product from the pharmacy.
2. Apply the product according to the MANUFACTURER'S INSTRUCTIONS, or according to the instructions you received from physician or pharmacist. Note that these products are often to be applied to dry hair. **DO NOT OVERTREAT!**
3. Have your child put on clean clothing after the treatment. You do the same. Manually remove all nits from the child's hair.

**This is time-consuming, but important, as your child will not be allowed to attend school until all nits are removed.**

4. Repeat treatment with pediculocide in 7 to 10 days as directed by manufacturer, because only 20% of nits die with the first treatment, and some may have been missed in the manual removal process.

Thoroughly cleaning bedding and all objects worn by the individual in the 2-day period before initial treatment is essential in controlling the spread of head lice. Effective disinfection can be achieved by vacuuming, machine-washing, machine-drying, dry cleaning, ironing, or storing articles in plastic bags for a period of two weeks. The following recommendations are based on the fact that temperatures of 130 degrees Fahrenheit are lethal to lice and their eggs.

Floors, rugs, pillows, upholstered furniture, and child's mattress should be thoroughly vacuumed.

All clothing, linens, and cloth toys that the infested individual may have worn or handled within two days of Identification should be machine-washed in hot water (130 degrees Fahrenheit).

Articles that cannot be machined washed but can be machine-dried should be dried at the hottest setting for at least 20 minutes.

Other articles should be dry-cleaned, carefully vacuumed, or sealed in plastic bags for 2 weeks.

Combs and brushes should be soaked in pediculocide or 130 degree or hotter water for 5 to 10 minutes.

**USE OF SPRAY INSECTICIDES IS NOT NECESSARY AND NOT RECOMMENDED. ACCORDING TO RESEARCH THEY CAN BE TOXIC IF INHALED OR ABSORBED THROUGH THE SKIN.**

Parents of your child's closest friends must be notified that their child may also be infested. This is particularly important if the children have had a sleepover or participated in activities involving close body contact. If the friend becomes infested while playing with your child and is not treated, your child may become reinfested from the friend. **TREATMENT DOES NOT PREVENT REINFESTATION.**

Your child may be brought to school the following morning, provided all nits are removed. Please make arrangements to meet the clinic medical assistant to examine your child's hair and scalp at that time. No students will be permitted in school until free of head lice and their nits (eggs).