

Communicating about Head Lice:

FAQ:

Q: What are head lice?

A: Head lice are tiny, wingless insects that live close to the human scalp. They feed only on human blood. Head lice can lay eggs, called nits, that hatch and cause itching and discomfort but do not spread disease.

Q: What do head lice look like?

A: There are many different forms of head lice: eggs, baby lice and adult lice. The eggs, also called nits, are tiny, teardrop-shaped eggs that attach to the hair shaft. They are often found around the nape of the neck or the ears. Nits may appear yellowish or white, and can look similar to dandruff. If it does not "fall" off the hair shaft easily, it is likely lice. These nits need to be pulled out of the child's hair to prevent reinfestation. Nymphs, or baby lice, are smaller and grow to adult size in one to two weeks. Adult lice are the size of a sesame seed and tan to grayish-white.

Q: How do you get head lice?

A: Head lice are mostly spread by direct head-to-head contact. For example, during play at home or school, slumber parties, sports activities or camp where heads of children are touching. Head lice do not jump or fly. They move by crawling.

Q: Are head lice dangerous?

A: No – Head lice are not dangerous. They do not transmit disease. It is important to treat the hair exactly as the medication states on the bottle so as to not harm the scalp of your child.

Q: How do I know if my child has head lice?

A: If your child complains of an itchy scalp – please check their hair for possible head lice. Live lice move quickly and avoid the light so they can be hard to see. You may not find a live louse, however, if you find eggs (nits) attached to the hair that do not fall out when you touch them, these are eggs and will hatch soon if they are not removed.

Q: Should I remove the eggs (nits) from my child's hair?

A: Yes – it is important to remove all nits from a child's head if at all possible. If live lice has been found on a child, please treat with the appropriate medicated shampoo. Then daily, check the child's hair for any nits and pull the nits from the hair shaft. In 7 days, it is very important to retreat the child's hair if it is stated to do so on the bottle you have used. Continue to check your child weekly if they are involved in any school, church or community activity.

Q: My child's classmate/friend has head lice. Is my child at risk?

A: Head lice move by crawling and cannot fly or jump. It is not common for lice to spread through sharing clothing or personal items, such as combs, towels or toys. The greatest risk of transmission is between people who have direct head-to-head contact when one person has an active case of head lice. Because a child with an active head lice infestation likely has had the infestation for 1 month or more by the time it is discovered and poses little risk to others from the infestation, he or she should remain in class but be discouraged from close direct head contact with others.

Q: What is the school doing to protect my child from getting head lice?

A: Lice are present in society today and any child is at risk of having head lice at any time. In school it is recommended that teachers do not allow pillows, fluffy rugs, couches or any other activity increasing the opportunity for students to be head-to-head. We also encourage social distancing and avoidance of sharing personal items.

Q: What can I teach my child about head lice?

A: Please educate your child on avoiding head-to-head contact with any student in the classroom or in your environment. Avoid cloth type seating in the community with your head resting on the cloth. Teach children not to share clothing, hats, scarves or other personal items.

Q: Why is the classroom not checked when a child may have head lice?

A: Mass screenings have proved to be disruptive to the educational process and to have little impact on identification of additional cases. There is likely someone in the school throughout the school year that has or had head lice recently. This is why it is extremely important for parents to check their children at home.

Q: Why can't a child be excluded from school for head lice anymore?

A: As of December 20, 2012, changes were made in the Texas Administrative Code, (25 TAC 97.7(a)). "Head lice: the exclusion requirements for head lice have been removed." Students diagnosed with live head lice do not need to be sent home early from school; they can go home at the end of the day, be treated, and return to class after appropriate treatment has begun. Nits may persist after treatment, but successful treatment should kill crawling lice. Head lice can be a nuisance but they have not been shown to spread disease. Personal hygiene or cleanliness in the home or school has nothing to do with getting head lice.