

Re: Head Lice Education

Dear Parent or Guardian:

As you may know, head lice cases are common among school-aged children. Please see the following to help you learn what you can do if lice hit your home.

#### What are head lice?

Head lice are tiny, wingless insects that live close to the human scalp. They feed on blood. The eggs, also called nits, are tiny, tear-drop shaped eggs that attach to the hair shaft. Nits often appear yellowish or white and can look like dandruff but cannot be removed or brushed off. The nymph, or baby louse, is smaller and grows to adult size in 1 to 2 weeks. The adult louse is about the size of a sesame seed and is tan to grayish-white. An itchy scalp is a common symptom of lice. Although not common, persistent scratching may lead to skin irritation and even infection.

#### Who is affected by head lice?

Head lice are not related to cleanliness. In fact, head lice often infest people with good hygiene and grooming habits. Infestations can occur at home, school, or in the community. 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. Less often, lice are spread via objects that have been in recent contact with a person with head lice, such as hats, scarves, hair ribbons, combs, brushes, stuffed animals, or bedding.

#### What to do if an infestation occurs?

If you think your child has a head lice, it's important to talk to your family healthcare provider right away to discuss the best treatment approach. There is no clear evidence that home remedies such as homeopathic shampoos or mayonnaise work, and they may just end up prolonging the problem. Others have depended on over-the-counter medications, but recent data shows that some head lice may be resistant to the main ingredient of these medicines. Treatment failure may also be caused by incorrect use of the product, misdiagnosis of the original condition, or re-infestation. Your healthcare provider can tell you about prescription treatment options available that are safe and do not require nit combing.

If your child is diagnosed with head lice, the school health office will provide you with information you need to address any head lice issue that may occur, and encourage you to talk with your healthcare provider to resolve the problem as quickly and effectively as possible. If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to reach out to your child's school health office.