



Head Lice: Frequently Asked Questions

- 1. What are head lice?**
 - a. Head lice are tiny, wingless insects that live close to the human scalp. They feed on human blood. Head lice can lay eggs, called nits, that hatch and cause itching and discomfort but do not spread disease.
- 2. What do head lice look like?**
 - a. When looking for head lice you may see several different forms: eggs, baby lice and adult lice. The eggs are tiny teardrop-shaped eggs that attach to the side of 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. Nits are firmly attached and difficult to remove. Some empty nits may remain attached to the hair even after all lice are gone. Nymphs, or baby lice, are smaller and grow to adult size in one to two weeks. Adults are the size of a sesame seed and tan to grayish-white.
- 3. How do you get head lice?**
 - a. Head lice are most often spread through direct head-to-head contact with close playmates and family members. Head lice are unlikely to spread in a typical school setting. Head lice move by crawling. They cannot jump or fly.
- 4. Can sharing clothing or personal items spread lice?**
 - a. Head lice cannot survive for very long off of the head. Therefore it is not common for head lice to spread by contact with items such as clothing, hats, scarves, coats or other personal items such as combs, brushes or towels.
- 5. Who is at risk for head lice?**
 - a. Everyone is susceptible to head lice. Infestations are not related to cleanliness. In fact, head lice often infest people with good hygiene and grooming habits.
- 6. Are head lice dangerous?**
 - a. Head lice are not dangerous. They do not transmit disease, but they do spread easily.
- 7. Why don't schools send letters to all parents when a student in class head lice?**
 - a. Sending letters home elevates the condition to a "communicable disease" which it is not; while head lice are a nuisance, they are not a health hazard.
 - b. Research has shown that head lice are unlikely to spread in a classroom. Sending letters would give the impression that head lice infestations originate in schools (which research has shown is not the case).
- 8. Why don't schools do classroom checks when a student has head lice?**
 - a. Research has found classroom and school-wide screenings to be ineffective in reducing the incidence of head lice among children.
- 9. Why doesn't the school district recognize that head lice are a significant problem for families?**
 - a. Head lice are an inconvenience and bother. Eradication is very time consuming and can be costly; however, head lice is not a communicable disease and is officially considered a pest.
 - b. Head lice are not considered "dangerous". They do not spread any known disease and are unlikely to be transferred in the typical school setting.
- 10. So what is a parent to do to protect their families from head lice?**
 - a. The best thing to do is to make checks for head lice a part of your weekly hygiene routine at home.