

All About Head Lice

The topic of head lice makes many of us uncomfortable. Some of the discomfort is due to a lack of understanding of the facts about how head lice are spread and how they survive.

Please lay aside what you have heard in the past. Studies and updated understandings have shed significant light upon the subject of head lice. We are writing to you now to share the facts about head lice and to inform you of significant changes made to the PUSD lice procedures, which are now based on the science behind lice, how they are spread, and how they survive.

First of all, the new PUSD lice procedures reflect the national standards of care. These standards are set by the California Department of Public Health, the American Academy of Pediatrics, the National Association of School Nurses, Harvard School of Public Health and many others.

The new standard is that students with eggs or head lice remain in school (rather than being immediately excluded). When lice are found on a child at school, that child's parent will be informed so they can administer treatment. The child will be allowed to finish the day at school. Treatment should occur at home before the student returns to school the next day. The school will follow up to make sure the child is treated appropriately. If the student is not treated appropriately, then he or she will not be able to attend school.

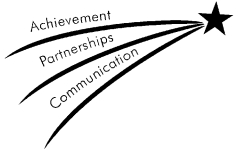
Why the change?

- School is NOT a high-risk area for getting lice. Multiple studies have proven that school is rarely the location of lice transmission. The vast majority of cases are spread by friends and family members who play or live together.
- By the time a case of lice is discovered, the child has often had them for 3-4 weeks. It makes little sense to immediately remove a student from class since lice are unlikely to spread in the classroom. The child can stay for the day.
- Unnecessary absences due to lice are detrimental to student achievement.
- Although lice are "icky," they do not cause disease and are not dangerous to the child or others. Lice do not spread any known disease.

Other facts:

- Head lice cannot hop or fly; they crawl.
- Lice spread by head-to-head contact.
- Head lice usually survive for less than 1 day away from the scalp.
- Indirect spread through contact with personal belongings (combs, brushes, hats) is unlikely; lice rarely leave a healthy head and those found on combs are usually injured or dead.
- Removal of nits immediately after treatment with a pediculicide is not necessary to prevent spread, because only live lice cause an infestation.

Lice often cause an emotional reaction. The "no-nit" policies of the past were based on that emotional reaction, not on scientific evidence of how lice are passed. In the last ten years, multiple studies have proven that keeping kids with eggs, or even lice, out of school does not reduce the amount of lice. Also, classroom



and school-wide screenings have been shown to be ineffective. "No nit" policies are bad for the well-being as well as the emotional and educational status of students.

What will the school do if a case of possible lice is reported or found?

- Trained staff will check any student reported to possibly have lice in a manner that protects the student's privacy. If lice are found, the parents of that child will be notified to begin treatment at the conclusion of the school day. Health Services will provide information about proper treatment.
- Parents of children with head lice will be encouraged to talk to the parents of close playmates.
- Students with lice will be rechecked in 7-9 days to make sure all lice are gone.
- If a parent does not follow through with the proper treatment, the child with lice will be excluded from school by the school district nurse until the proper treatment has been completed.

Recommended treatment:

1. Use an over-the-counter pediculicide, like Nix.
2. Repeat treatment in 7-10 days to kill any surviving eggs.
3. Comb out the nits as desired. Removal of nits is an aesthetic choice. Nits are NOT lice.
4. The district nurse can offer extra help to families of children who are repeatedly or chronically infested.

Here is a link for those of you who want more information:

<http://www.cdc.gov/parasites/lice/head/>

With wishes for your good health,

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