

# LICE

## A Head Lice Handbook for Parents

**Dear Vernon Township Public School Parents:**

**This handbook is designed to provide helpful information to parents regarding head lice. Every year there have been several reported cases of head lice in our schools. It has been reported that, with the exception of the common cold, head lice infestation affects more school-aged children than all other communicable childhood diseases combined. Please read through this handbook and retain it for future reference. Further information on head lice and its treatment may be obtained in the school's health office. When we all work together, we will be able to keep this problem under control.**

## **Our Revised Nit Procedures**

In the winter of 2013, the Health Offices of the Vernon Township Public Schools adopted a procedure that no longer embraced the previous "No Nit" Policy. Scientific data supports this procedure within the school setting. It was found that when students were excluded from attending school for presenting with a few nits (lice eggs), the outcome for the spread of head lice was not improved. Students were losing important academic time while the lice and nits were totally removed. It also often created a hardship for parents, due to lost time at work.

In the winter of 2013, the Health Offices of the Vernon Township Public Schools adopted a procedure that no longer excluded children for nits/eggs but will exclude for live lice. The CDC states that head lice can be a nuisance but they have not been shown to spread disease (2010).

If lice (pediculosis) or nits are found on your child please notify your physician and the school nurse. After necessary treatment of your child's hair, you must accompany your child to the school nurse. This visit to the school nurse is mandatory. The school nurse will check your child's head to assure that he/she has been adequately treated. There are a variety of over-the-counter and prescription chemical lice treatment shampoos available. Please consult with your physician to decide which shampoo is best for your child. In some cases, a parent or a physician chooses not to use chemical lice treatment shampoos, as to not expose the child to the possible adverse effects of a pesticide. In this case, mechanical removal with a quality lice comb by the parent or a lice treatment specialist is acceptable. When lice treatment is complete, there still remains the necessity for the parent to go through the child's entire head of hair, both in the morning and evening, for at least 3-4 weeks after the lice and/or nits are found. For several additional weeks you must check your child's head at least once a day for nits and lice. If you find more live lice, contact your child's physician immediately and notify the school nurse.

This handbook offers information to give you the tools and knowledge to deal with head lice and nits. However, it is the parent's or guardian's responsibility to consult with their child's

physician and make their own decisions for best appropriate treatment of head lice for their family.

## **Notifying the School and Your Child's Contacts**

If you find head lice or nits on your child, contact your child's physician and then notify the school nurse. Prompt notification is essential to the school's efforts to bring this problem under control. It enables the school to implement and enforce its head lice control program. Early detection is critical for effective management of head lice.

After notifying the school nurse, alert the parents of any child who has been in contact with your child during the previous three to four weeks. This includes your child's friends and car pool buddies, as well as "The Y," Scouts and after-school classes, such as dance, gymnastics and karate. This may be difficult, but it is vital to control the spread of head lice. There is no reason to be embarrassed; keep in mind that anyone can get head lice. If someone has a negative reaction, it is that person's problem, not yours. You are acting responsibly and most people will appreciate it. Parents who have had direct experience with head lice advise that they were extremely upset over not being alerted promptly, as it delayed detection. This, in turn, made treatment more time consuming, because the infestation was at a more advanced stage by the time it was detected.

## **Lice Policy Implementation...The School's Role**

When a case of head lice has been discovered or reported to the school, the school will follow the guidelines below, to assist in combating re-infestation among the school population.

- The child found with nits may remain in school. The parents/guardians will be notified as soon as possible. The nurse will educate the parents/guardians on lice and available treatments. The parents/guardians are advised to discuss the best treatment for their child with the child's physician. The child may be picked up earlier in the day for treatment if the parent/guardian wishes to. Depending on the severity of the lice infestation, the school nurse informs the child's teacher, while maintaining confidentiality, and checks all classmates for head lice and nits.
- Every effort is made to make the affected child feel comfortable. While maintaining confidentiality, the children are taught in a matter-of-fact manner about how lice are spread and that no one is immune. We provide a calm, rational, yet firm commitment to controlling the spread of lice.
- Girls with long hair are encouraged to wear their hair up in a pony tail, decreasing the chance of one girl's hair touching another student's hair.
- Teachers are asked to remind students about maintaining "personal space," avoiding head-to-head contact, not sharing personal hair care items, and refraining from touching other children's hair in school.
- A child returning to school after head lice treatment is required to be checked by the school nurse prior to returning to their classroom. (The parent or guardian needs to accompany the child to the health office prior to the start of class.) If live lice are found, the school nurse will refer the parent/guardian and student to their physician for further

treatment and the child will be excluded from school. If nits are found, the school nurse will encourage the parent/guardian to continue removing nits daily.

## **Lice Policy Implementation...The Parent's Responsibilities**

Lice control lies primarily with the parents, who have the responsibility for carrying out the safest, most thorough lice treatment possible, as directed by their physician. Parents must take appropriate action to detect, manage and prevent cases of head lice from entering the school. (Remember, schools don't breed lice, people do.)

General Measures: As a part of your routine hygiene, once-a-week head checks should be done at home. This is especially important if your child interacts with various groups of children throughout town (e.g., after-school care programs, gymnastics, dance, scouts, religious education classes, sports where helmets may be shared, sleepovers, etc.).

Educate your child about head lice and how they are transmitted. Lice do not jump or fly. They crawl from head to head by direct contact only. Therefore, it is important to teach your child to maintain their own "personal space" (e.g., not to bunch up in learning groups or in line and not to share headgear, hats, scarves, etc.).

Discuss the subject of lice in an open and matter-of-fact manner, as this helps to demystify the whole matter. If you are calm, your children will also be calm. Additionally, they will feel less stigmatized if lice infestation affects your family and more compassionate if lice affects a friend or classmate.

## **If You Find Lice on Your Child**

- Contact your physician and treat your child as directed. Call the school nurse.
- After treatment of lice as directed by your child's physician, remove nits from hair. Removing nits is important because it helps to avoid hatching of eggs that have survived the treatment and help to avoid diagnostic confusion in the future. Nits can remain in the hairs for weeks and even years in some cases. This can be a long and tedious process. It helps to have a friend or family member assist you and should be carried out in full sunlight, if possible.
- Inform anyone with whom your child has had contact including at "The Y", gymnastics, carpools, friends, etc.
- When you feel you have completed all that has to be done to rid your child's head, accompany him/her to the school nurse to be rechecked prior to his/her return to the classroom. This is a requirement of our school's lice policy. If live lice are found, the school nurse will refer the parent/guardian and student to their physician for further treatment and the child will be excluded from school. If nits are found, the school nurse will encourage the parent/guardian to continue removing nits daily.
- When returning to school, tie long hair back securely in ponytails or braids. Instruct your child to leave their hair in place.
- Continue to check your child's head, as well as other family members' heads, at least once a day for a few weeks. If

- If you find many more nits, contact your physician for additional advice. There have been reports of lice resistance to the treatment products which are available.

## Treating Your Child and Affected Family Members

If you find lice or nits on your child's head, you should carefully check all family members before commencing treatment. Approximately 59% of infested students will have an infested family member (Clare & Longyear 1990). In addition to treatment with commercially available pediculicides, other modes of treatment may include: the use of alternative therapies, heating the hair shaft by a lice-treatment specialist, and relying on manual removal alone. Whatever method is carried out, you must be aware that the most seemingly benign material, such as diluted vinegar, can be harmful to the integrity of the treated person's skin and scalp and can make matters worse. Hot blow dryers and gasoline are also not advised as this has caused burns to children in the past. **It is not advisable that anyone who is not infested with live lice be treated with pediculicides, and then, only after consulting with his/her physician.** Kwell® and other lindane-based products (by prescription) are not recommended. Adverse reactions, ranging from seizure to death have occurred with their use. Conventional treatment involves the use of a pediculicide product, available at your pharmacy (such as NIX® or RID®) and the manual removal of all nits. There are also prescription shampoos available as well. Once you have decided upon the appropriate treatment to use and have been directed to do so by your physician, proceed to treat infested family members as follows:

- Assemble materials needed for removal of nits, such as bobby pins, hair clips, nit removal comb, scissors, magnifying glass, tissues/paper towels and small plastic bags. Tie your own hair back.
- A quality metal nit removal comb.
- Carefully read the package insert and follow all directions that come with the product. For example, you may be directed to apply product to dry, not wet, hair. Remove your child's shirt and provide a towel to protect their eyes. Do not treat your child in the bathtub or shower. Apply the product over the sink, as this confines the lice product to the scalp and neck. Do not leave the product on longer than directed, as this could be harmful.
- The person applying the product should wear protective gloves.
- There are crème rinses available (such as Step 2®) that claim to make it easier to remove nits. If you decide to use such a product, review and follow all of the directions.
- Remove all lice and nits as detailed in the section entitled "Successful Nit Removal", working under a good light (bright sunlight is best). A special comb may aid in nit removal, but it cannot remove all nits. Remaining nits must be removed with your fingernails, as described below.
- As they are located, the lice and nits need to be removed from the comb with a paper towel or tissue. Those nits that do not come out with the comb need to be removed with your fingernail (scrape each nit down to the end of the hair) or with a small scissors (cut the individual hair strand). The nits, lice and hair strands need to be placed in a sealed plastic bag and discarded. Live lice are fast and quickly scurry away from light.

- When you are finished, put clean clothing on your child. Wash your hands and scrub under your fingernails (a nail brush is helpful). Infested family members should also scrub under their fingernails, particularly any child who has been scratching his/her head.
- Soak any items you have used (combs, bobby pins, etc.) in very hot (not boiling) water for at least 10 minutes.
- Check your child's head thoroughly at least once a day for 14 days. A thorough check involves looking at each hair strand. This may take several hours. Contact your physician if there is evidence of new nits or newly hatched lice. (Although any treatment decision is the sole responsibility of the parents/guardians in conjunction with their family physician). After this 14-day period, head checking should become a part of your daily routine.
- Although the nit removal and subsequent daily head checks are time consuming and difficult, they are critical steps to prevent a recurrence. None of the over-the-counter commercial products kills 100% of the nits. Tiny, viable nits that may not be killed by the shampoo or detected and removed in the first head checks will hatch within 7-10 days and the head lice cycle begins all over again. Prescription products are successful in killing the nits, however nit removal is encouraged to avoid diagnostic confusion later.
- Treat your home for lice and nits according to the steps outlined in the section that follows entitled "Treating Your Home."

## Successful Nit Removal

- While the hair is still damp, comb out snarls and tangles with your regular comb.
- Part and secure the hair into four sections. Choose one section on which to start working.
- Start at the top of the head, in the section of hair you have chosen. With one hand, lift a one-inch wide tuft of hair.
- With the other hand, comb with a firm, even motion away from the scalp to the end of the hair. Make sure that the teeth of the comb are as deep into the tuft of hair as possible.
- Be careful to comb all the way to the end of each one-inch tuft of hair.
- Clean comb and put all lice/nits into a sealed plastic bag.
- Strand by strand, examine each one-inch section for nits and lice that the comb may have missed. Remove each one by using your fingernails (scrape each nit down to the end of the hair) or with a small scissors (cut the individual hair strand). Dispose of nits, lice and hair strands in a sealed plastic bag.
- Using bobby pins or hair clips, pin back each one-inch tuft after you have finished with it.
- Continue combing and pinning until you have completed each one-inch tuft in that entire section of hair.
- Repeat for each of the remaining sections.

- If the hair dries during combing, dampen slightly with water.
- After you have finished the entire head, rinse thoroughly.
- Be sure to discard all lice, nits and hair strands in sealed plastic bags. Wash your hands, scrub under your fingernails and soak all items used in hot water, as described in the previous section entitled “Treating Your Child....”

## Treating Your Home

- Machine wash all clothing, bedding (including pads, comforter, pillow shams and dust ruffle), pillows, towels, hats, scarves and any other items which have been in contact with your child or affected family members during the last three days, in hot water. Place items in the dryer, set on high, for at least 20 minutes. Continue daily to wash such articles separately in this fashion until you are certain your family is nit free.
- Items that are not machine washable, such as stuffed animals and helmets, should be stored at room temperature in a tightly sealed plastic bag for at least two weeks. If a coat of an affected family member has been hanging in the closet with other coats, machine-wash the other coats, send them to a professional dry cleaner or bag them. After you wash the coat, keep it separate from the others until you are certain the owner is nit free.
- Vacuum your entire home. Thoroughly vacuum household items that cannot be washed or bagged, such as carpets, couches, chairs and mattresses. Until your family is nit free, the affected members should not sit with their heads against upholstered furniture. You also need to vacuum your car and your child's car seat. Vacuum everything daily until you are certain your family is nit free. Dispose of the vacuum bag after each use.
- Do not use household lice sprays. Both the National Pediculosis Association, Inc. and the Center For Disease Control (CDC) strongly discourage the use of insecticide sprays, as they may be harmful to family members and pets and the benefit of their use is questionable.

## Questions and Answers

### **What Are Head Lice And What Do I Look For?**

Head lice (medically termed pediculosis) are small insects about the size of a sesame seed. They are usually light brown, but can vary in color. They move quickly and shy away from light, making them difficult to see. The eggs are called nits. Nits are tiny, oval, grayish or yellowish-white and are firmly attached at an angle to the hair shaft. As the eggs are deposited, they are cemented to the hair. Unlike dandruff, which they resemble, nits will not wash off or blow away.

Nits are often located at the nape of the neck, behind the ears and at the crown. If you only find nits more than ¼ inch from the scalp (and don't see a nymph or adult louse), the infestation is probably old and does not need to be treated.

**How Are Head Lice Transmitted?**

They do not jump or fly. They are commonly transmitted by hair-to-hair contact with infested persons or with their personal belongings. If two children have their heads together sharing a book, working on a project, playing a video game, wrestling, etc., one child can transmit lice to the other.

**Are There Any Symptoms Of Head Lice?**

The itching that occurs when lice bite and suck blood from the scalp is a primary symptom of infestation; however, not everyone will experience itching. If your child complains of an itchy head, or if you notice your child scratching his or her head, the child's scalp should be examined at once. Lice are often difficult to detect; diagnosis is more often made on the basis of finding nits. Because nits can be hard to see, you should section your child's hair an inch at a time. Always work under a good light. It's best to examine your child outdoors, using natural sunlight. It may be helpful to use a magnifying glass. Since nits are often located at the nape of the neck, behind the ears and at the crown, particular attention should be given to these areas.