



SYRACUSE CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT

Pamela J. Odom, Superintendent of Schools

Health Services

SCSD Head Lice Procedures and Guidance for Parents/Guardians

Students identified as having live head lice are not excluded or sent home early from school unless the student is unable to participate in school activities due to being uncomfortably itchy; they may go home at the end of the day, transported home as usual and are referred to their parent/guardian for treatment. The guidelines included in this document can be followed by the parent to treat their child for head 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.

Screening of entire classes or school have not found to be effective; disrupt the educational process, have not been shown to reduce the incidence and not recommended. Nits, tiny eggs attached to the base of individual hairs, may persist after treatment, but successful treatment should kill crawling lice.

Both the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) and the National Association of School Nurses (NASN) as well as SCSD do not advocate “no-nit” policies for the following reasons:

- Many nits are more than ¼ inch from the scalp. Such nits are usually not viable and very unlikely to hatch to become crawling lice, or may in fact be empty shells, also known as casings.
- Nits are cemented to hair shafts and are very unlikely to be transferred successfully to other people.
- The burden of unnecessary absenteeism to the students, families and communities far outweighs the risks associated with head lice.
- Misdiagnosis of nits is very common during nit checks conducted by non-medical personnel.

Facts About Head Lice for Parents/Guardians

Listed below are several facts about head lice that will help you understand what these insects are and how an infection may spread. The facts may help you understand how to manage this problem at home.

- Head lice are tiny wingless insects that live in human hair. They hatch from small eggs, called nits, which are attached to the base of individual hairs. The nits hatch in ten days and reach adulthood in about two weeks. As the louse feeds on its host, it injects saliva into the wound resulting in local irritation and itching.
- In their early stages, lice are very difficult to see and blend into the hair. Often, their eggs (or “nits”) are easier to see and appear as small white specks on individual hair shafts. These specks can be confused with dandruff but they are more difficult to remove because they are attached to the hair with a strong glue-like substance.
- Lice come from a family of parasites that must stay on their host to survive. If they are off the body from two to five days, they die.
- Direct head-to-head contact is by far the most common means of transmission. They do not have wings nor the leg structures necessary for jumping. Head lice do have six short legs that enable them to crawl.
- There is a small chance that inanimate objects (rugs, toy, stuffed animals, school buses, backpacks) may be the source of head lice transference. However, a louse that is not attached to a person will die after 2-5 days.
- Lice can be found on persons of any age, race, sex, or socioeconomic class. Lice do not discriminate and prefer clean hair to dirty hair because it’s easier for the egg to be cemented to the hair shaft.
- Lice can infest people with any length of hair. Cutting or shaving the hair is not necessary. Treating the hair with topical hair treatment is necessary as well removing nits by thorough combing with a lice comb or manually removing them with your fingers.
- Nits can remain attached to the hair shaft for months because they are secured with a waterproof, cement like substance. Treatment is warranted only when active lice or viable eggs are present. No one should be treated “just in case.” This leads to resistance of head lice to chemicals in treatment. Hair treatments containing insecticides can be toxic if used improperly.



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Treatment

- Should only take about 1 hour. Careful removal of as many nits as possible is very important. Daily combing is a critically important part of the process to prevent re-infestation if any remaining nits hatch.
- Follow the directions on the hair treatment medication label very carefully.

If you have questions, feel free to contact your school nurse directly or Health Services at 315-435-4145

Guidelines for the Treatment of Head Lice

If your child was examined and found to have live lice: Consult your physician for the appropriate medication.

Treat the infested person(s): Requires using an Over the counter (OTC) or prescription medication.

Follow these treatment steps:

- Before applying treatment, it may be helpful to remove clothing that can become wet or stained during treatment.
- Apply lice medicine, also called pediculicide, according to the instructions contained in the box or printed on the label. If the infested person has very long hair (longer than shoulder length), it may be necessary to use a second bottle. Pay special attention to instructions on the label or in the box regarding how long the medication should be left on the hair and how it should be washed out. **WARNING:** Do not use a combination shampoo/conditioner, or conditioner before using lice medicine. Do not re-wash the hair for 1–2 days after the lice medicine is removed.
- Have the infested person put on clean clothing after treatment.
- If a few live lice are still found 8–12 hours after treatment, but are moving more slowly than before, do not retreat. The medicine may take longer to kill all the lice. Comb dead and any remaining live lice out of the hair using a fine-toothed nit comb.
- If, after 8–12 hours of treatment, no dead lice are found and lice seem as active as before, the medicine may not be working. Do not retreat until speaking with your health care provider; a different pediculicide may be necessary. If your health care provider recommends a different pediculicide, carefully follow the treatment instructions contained in the box or printed on the label.
- Nit (head lice egg) combs, often found in lice medicine packages, should be used to comb nits and lice from the hair shaft. Many flea combs made for cats and dogs are also effective.
- After each treatment, checking the hair and combing with a nit comb to remove nits and lice every 2–3 days may decrease the chance of self-reinfestation. Continue to check for 2–3 weeks to be sure all lice and nits are gone. Nit removal is not needed when treating with spinosad topical suspension.
- Retreatment is meant to kill any surviving hatched lice before they produce new eggs. For some drugs, retreatment is recommended routinely about a week after the first treatment (7–9 days, depending on the drug) and for others only if crawling lice are seen during this period. Retreatment with lindane shampoo is not recommended.
- **Supplemental Measures:** Head lice do not survive long if they fall off a person and cannot feed. You don't need to spend a lot of time or money on housecleaning activities. Follow these steps to help avoid re-infestation by lice that have recently fallen off the hair or crawled onto clothing or furniture.
- Machine wash and dry clothing, bed linens, and other items that the infested person wore or used during the 2 days before treatment using the hot water (130°F) laundry cycle and the high heat drying cycle. Clothing and items that are not washable can be dry-cleaned **OR** sealed in a plastic bag and stored for 2 weeks.
- Soak combs and brushes in hot water (at least 130°F) for 5–10 minutes.
- Vacuum the floor and furniture, particularly where the infested person sat or lay. However, the risk of getting infested by a louse that has fallen onto a rug or carpet or furniture is very small. Head lice survive less than 1–2 days if they fall off a person and cannot feed; nits cannot hatch and usually die within a week if they are not kept at the same temperature as that found close to the human scalp. Spending much time and money on housecleaning activities is not necessary to avoid reinfestation by lice or nits that may have fallen off the head or crawled onto furniture or clothing.
- Do not use fumigant sprays; they can be toxic if inhaled or absorbed through the skin.



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Guidelines for the Treatment of Head Lice (cont'd)

If your child can not use additional medication:

- 1) Comb hair thoroughly with a louse comb. Most lice will be removed during this first combing.
- 2) Repeat combing every day. Each combing will remove a portion of the remaining lice and some that may have hatched in the meantime.
- 3) Continue daily combing until there has been two weeks without any live lice seen.
- 4) Removal of nits is a personal choice, as these are likely to be all dead or hatched.

Things to avoid:

- 1) Whole house clean-ups. Adult lice can't live off a person's head for more than a day or two.
- 2) Pesticide sprays. They are unnecessary and not worth even the small health risk.
- 3) Mayonnaise, margarine, petroleum jelly, olive oil, tea-tree oil, hand sanitizer. There is no evidence that this works.
- 4) Cutting your child's hair or shaving their head. It's needlessly upsetting to the child.
- 5) Gasoline or kerosene. These folk remedies kill or maim a few children each year when the volatile fumes accidentally ignite. These substances should **NEVER** be applied to the hair.

CDC Parasites Treatment General Guidelines, [CDC - Lice - Head Lice - Treatment](#)

Managing Infectious Diseases in Child Care and Schools, American Academy of Pediatrics, 2005. Statewide School Health Services Website, CDC

School Nurse Resource Manual, Evidence Based Guide to Practice, 2020