

Head Lice Policy Changes: Evidence Based Management in the School Setting

For many years, KSD had a policy of excluding students from school immediately upon finding head lice or nits. Past screening and exclusion practices in schools have contributed to the myths and stigma about head lice which are not supported by research. Current evidence suggests that these requirements and other school measures such as vacuuming, spraying and undue concern about spread through shared school items is not warranted. These policies have resulted in discrimination, unnecessary lost time from school, and embarrassment for students and families.

For over the last ten years, reputable research from the Harvard School of Public Medicine, The American Academy of Pediatrics, The Center for Disease Control, The National School Nurses Association and others have made recommendations that provide results based on scientific evidence.

- **“No nit policies should be discontinued.”** (American Association of Pediatrics and the National Association of School Nurses)
- **“Excluding children from school with head lice does not affect the total number of cases each year.”** (American Academy of Pediatrics 2002) **and**
- **“Students diagnosed with live head lice do not need to be sent home early from school.”** (CDC 2010)

What are Head Lice?

- Head lice are small insects that can live on the scalp and neck of a human host. They do not live on animals.
- They hatch from small eggs (nits) that are attached with a cement-like substance to the shaft of individual hairs.
- They must have the warmth of the human body and blood on the scalp to survive.
- They are NOT a health hazard, a sign of uncleanliness nor do they spread disease.
- Head lice have "claws" that keep them attached to the hair and they swing from hair to hair like trapeze artists. They do not fly or jump. They want to STAY on the hair near the scalp.
- They need very close head-to-head contact to spread from one person to another. Homes and camps are the most common mode of transmission.
- Indirect transmission is uncommon but may occur via shared combs, brushes, hats and hair accessories that have been in contact with lice. RARELY are they spread through shared helmets or headsets.
- Itching occurs when they inject a bit of saliva into the scalp, but itching can persist even after treatment and is not a reliable sign of lice.
- When lice are discovered, they have usually been there about a month.

Basic Treatment (Parents may wish to consult with their physician or pharmacist)

- Over the counter chemical treatments and combing out lice/nits OR
- Mechanical removal (combing out lice and nits) AND
- Cleaning bed linens and personal items that contacted the hair

Revised Head Lice Policy for Kennewick School District

- The customary notification for the presence of head lice is to be done on an individual/case by case basis to the parent/guardian of an infested student.
- Students found to have live lice; parent will be notified by phone and student may remain in school to the end of the day and a letter sent home regarding treatment.
- Parents are reminded to remove nits as possible and retreat 8-10 days or as suggested by manufacture’s labels.
- Schools will remind families to routinely check their students throughout the year.
- At the nurses discretion, a “no nit” policy may be imposed on students who are repeatedly/chronically infested (OSPI 2004).

Additional Information about Head Lice

Center for Disease Control and Prevention: Parasites-Lice- Head Lice <http://www.cdc.gov/parasites/lice/head/schools.html>

Spokane Regional Health District- Head Lice <http://www.srhd.org/topics/lice.asp>