

Lice Management Protocol

Lice: A Community Nuisance

Research shows that lice is always present in our communities, similar to viruses and bacteria. Therefore, from time to time, lice is discovered on a student at our school. It is our goal that everyone in the Yinghua community will be well-informed about how to effectively prevent, identify, and treat the spread of lice, both at home and at school.

Lice is not associated with poor hygiene; they are actually attracted to clean hair. Lice cannot jump or fly and do not like to leave a person's head or hair. The American Academy of Pediatrics confirms that lice spreads almost exclusively from head to head contact. Transmission of lice almost never occurs between two inanimate objects, such as coats, cots, or even hats. Instead, lice spreads when children spend extended time playing together with their hair touching. This is most often seen at sleep-overs and play dates, as well as with younger students due to their typical play behavior. Research shows that less than 10% of lice cases are transmitted to other students while in school.

A reassuring fact about the school environment: Adult lice rarely fall off students' heads (eggs never do), but if one ever did fall off at school, it can only live 24 hours off the human body before dying. Therefore, after every weekend you can be assured that the school building is lice free.

Annual Staff Education

All staff members at Yinghua Academy receive annual training and ongoing education related to our lice policy. They can also consult with the school nurse if any questions or concerns arise during the school year. Teachers are trained to take the following preventative measures:

- Teachers do their best to ensure students' clothing, coats, hats or personal items are not touching. They also do not allow students to share hats.
- Teachers remind students not to play with heads touching each other.
- They do not let students in kindergarten rest on their assigned cots with heads near each other.
- If a teacher suspects a student is showing possible symptoms of lice, such as an itchy scalp, they will bring the student to the health office for a confidential head check.

Recommendations for Checking for Lice

Although it is impossible to completely prevent lice, it is very important for parents to remain vigilant to routinely check their children for lice, especially after any type of play date or sleepover with relatives or friends. **We recommend**

parents check all their children weekly, whether or not they appear to have symptoms of lice. For information on how to effectively check for lice or on current recommended treatment options, please see the Health Services webpage titled, "Lice: What Parents Need To Know".

Reporting Lice

Parents should report all cases of lice to the school so we are able to track occurrences and notify classrooms when needed. Parents can report a case of lice by using the "Report an Absence" tool on the school website and choosing "sick", which then gives a further option to choose "lice" as the reason for missing school. Parents can also call the office or Health Office directly to report a case of lice and/or ask for advice about treatment.

School Staff Member Suspects Student has Lice

If a teacher or staff member suspects that a student may have lice at school, they can discreetly send the student to the Health Office for a head check. The Health Office staff will then check the student according to recommended procedures. If no nits (eggs) or live lice are found, it does not guarantee that the child does not have lice, since live lice move quickly and are often difficult to locate. Therefore, an email will be sent to parents explaining the circumstances and symptoms their child is displaying, such as scratching neck or scalp while in class, and will ask parents to continue weekly head checks. Lice may later be evident, or another cause, such as rash, infection, dry skin, etc. may be present.

If live lice or nits are found, the Health Office staff will notify parents of findings by phone and clarify whether or not the child has already recently been treated for lice. If untreated, the Health Office staff will discuss with parents possible treatment options and return to school criteria (see below). Parents will then need to decide if they will pick their child up immediately to begin treatment or wait until the end of the school day. This should be based on both the parent and the student's comfort level. Research shows that most students have already had lice for 3-4 weeks before it is discovered and that transmission within the classroom is very low, so there is no immediate risk to having a student with lice remain until the end of the school day. This can also help reduce parental hardship and maintain privacy. Health Office staff will remind the student not to hug or touch heads with other students.

Communication with Families

When a case of live lice or untreated nits is discovered at school or a parent reports an absence due to lice, the Health Office will send an email to parents that states when the student is able to return to school (see below), possible treatment options, and offering support as needed. Also, Health Office staff will remind parents to check siblings and notify the families of any children that might have recently had close head to head contact with their child. The email will include the following attachments:

- Lice Myths and Facts Informational Sheet

- Minnesota Department of Health Head Lice Fact Sheet
- Head Lice: Parent Fact Sheet by Hennepin County Human Services and Public Health Department

The Health Office will also focus on educating the community proactively by sending out regularly scheduled head lice information letters or newsletter articles several times during the year. This may include, for example, basic facts about head lice, reminders to regularly check children's hair, and current treatment options.

Return to School

Students with an active lice infestation need to complete an initial lice treatment, carefully following instructions, before returning to school. Parents should continue to check for nits and live lice for the next 2-4 weeks and complete a second lice treatment according to the prescribed directions. Health Office staff will also confidentially recheck students two weeks after treatment. However, as stated above, if no live lice is found, the Health Office cannot guarantee that a student is 100% lice free. Also, nits (eggs) may still be present after treatment, but if they were effectively treated, they may no longer be viable (alive). Also, if nits are found to be greater than a half inch away from the scalp along the hair shaft, they are already dead or hatched. Therefore, the presence of nits after treatment should not prevent any student from returning to class.

Notification of Lice in a Classroom

Each report of lice is treated as confidential. There is usually no reason a teacher or other students would need to know which specific student in a class has lice since transmission in the school setting is rare. Research shows that the practice of sending out notifications to parents is ineffective in preventing the spread of lice, perpetuates the myth that lice is spread at school, and often creates unnecessary alarm and stigma.

Therefore, the Health Office will only send out notifications to parents and staff if there are two or more occurrences in the same classroom within a three month period. The Health Office will send out a general notification fact sheet, created by Hennepin County, to alert the parents in the particular class that their child may have been exposed to lice. If there are additional occurrences reported in the same class within a four week period (after the initial threshold of two students has been reached), another notification will not be sent, since parents have already been notified. Homeroom teachers will also be included in these general notifications so they are aware of the occurrences.

Classroom-wide Screens

Health Office staff will not conduct classroom-wide screens unless there is a pattern of continual cases of lice within a particular classroom or at the discretion of the nurse. Research shows this practice is not effective in detecting or preventing lice, is very time-consuming, and can cause unnecessary

embarrassment and alarm. Although in some cases additional students with lice may be identified, there is no guarantee that screened students are lice free even if nothing was found during the screen.

If a classroom-wide screen is performed, parents will first be notified by email. Students will then be checked privately in the Health Office. A follow-up email with results and recommendations will also be sent to parents by email. The Health Office will continue to work with parents and staff to help support any students with active cases of lice.

*For details of research data and additional information, see PEDIATRIC NURSING/September-October 2014/Vol. 40/No. 5, Demystifying Pediculosis: School Nurses Taking the Lead by Deborah J. Pontius, or contact the school nurse for a copy.