

Parent Fact Sheet

Pediculosis/Head Lice

What is pediculosis? Pediculosis, or Head Lice, is an infestation of the scalp by an insect that feeds on human blood. Although head lice do not transmit diseases, secondary infections can develop from scratching the itchy bites.

How is it spread? Pediculosis is usually spread by direct head to head contact. Hats, helmets, clothing, brushes, and pillows are other ways head lice can spread from one person to another. The transmission of head lice in the elementary school setting is uncommon and the number of cases identified each year in our schools is low.

What do they look like? Head lice are small, only about 1/16th of an inch in length, and are grey, tan or brown in color. Lice cannot fly or jump, but do move quickly and are therefore very difficult to find on the scalp. Diagnosis of head lice is generally made when lice eggs (nits) are seen. Nits are teardrop in shape and also very small, only about 1/32nd of an inch. The white, tan or brown nits are glued to the hair shaft and cannot be washed or brushed out like dandruff. Nits can be found anywhere on the head but are usually clustered around the ears and the back of the neck.

How is Head Lice treated? Treating head lice often involves the use of a pediculicide (lice killing) shampoo. A variety of products can be found in the grocery store or pharmacy. Permethrin or pyrethrin are the active ingredients. It is important to follow the product instructions. It is appropriate to consult with a healthcare provider to discuss the best treatment approach for your family. Resistance to some over-the-counter head lice treatments has been reported, but the prevalence of resistance is not known. There are new prescription treatment options available. Cleaning of the environment and removal of the nits are essential components of the treatment process. Affected students are treated at home and regularly checked by the school nurse. **Parents are urged to check children on a regular basis and to report all cases or suspected cases to the school nurse.**

Where can I get more information? Informational links have been added to the school web site. **Lice Lessons** are a series of educational resources created by the National Association of School Nurses. The American Academy of Pediatrics, Center for Disease Control www.cdc.gov, and Kids Health www.kidshealth.org are excellent web resources for parents and children. If lice are detected, please inform your child's school nurse and the parents of recent close contacts. Mrs. Bowers may be reached at 973-838-1999 x2005 or bowersm@kinnelon.org. Mrs. Hatke can be reached at 973-838-0611 x 1005 or hatken@kinnelon.org.