



PROTOCOL FOR THE MANAGEMENT OF PEDICULOSIS CAPITIS (HEAD LICE)

Protocol

A student who is found to be infected with live head lice shall be referred to the parent/guardian for treatment. After the student has been treated, the student may be re-admitted to school upon inspection at school by the school nurse, or his/her designee. According to the 2015 AAP Head Lice Policy, no healthy child should be excluded from school because of lice or nits.

Background Information

Head lice are tiny insects that live on the human host. They are difficult to find because they are very small (about the size of a sesame seed), move quickly and shy away from strong light. They hatch from nits (eggs) that are firmly attached to the hair shaft, and are grayish-white or yellow-white in color. This process takes 7 to 10 days. In another 7 days the lice are fully mature, and the female begins to lay eggs. Lice cannot jump or fly but they spread with close contact. Lice do not live on cats, dogs, or other animals - only on humans. Lice can live up to 48 hours off the human host. Lice live by dropping saliva into a bite to prevent blood clotting and feeding for 45 seconds every 3-4 hours if undisturbed. This results in intense itching. The average female louse matures in 7-10 days, lays 3-4 eggs a day, and has a 1 month life span (90 + eggs). All infected family members, or if in a daycare or babysitting environment, all infected children and adults, should be treated at the same time.

Symptoms

The most common symptom is itching and scratching of the head. The lice bite the skin and suck blood from the host, and the saliva creates a reaction of intense itching.

Physical Assessment

Screen any suspected lice case using gloves, magnifying glass and natural light (if possible). Examine scalp, especially back of head, behind ears and any particular spot where the student notes itching. Lice move quickly. The presence of nits firmly attached to the hair shaft is a sign of infestation. The nits are firmly attached (usually within 1/2" of the scalp) and cannot be brushed away.

Management

1. The school nurse will notify parents of the student with lice or nits and recommend treatment that evening using the manual removal of nits and

application of an over-the-counter medicated shampoo. Students will be sent home at the end of the day and not excluded from class due to the detection of lice or nits. The student may return to school the next day if they have received treatment at home. See “Home Treatment” below.

2. If more than one case of lice is known in a class or student grouping, the school nurse will screen the class for other cases either by bringing small groups (3-5 students) to the health office or by going to the classroom.
3. If an unusual clustering of active head lice cases (3 or more) is discovered in a grouping of children, parents will be notified with a letter from the school nurse and/or administrator. An informational notice will be put in the school newsletter if there are more than a few (4-5) active cases of head lice in a school building.
4. The school nurse will consult with the teacher and other appropriate staff concerning hygiene requirements of the class where an unusual clustering of lice cases has been noted. Coats should not be piled together and classroom “dress up” clothes should be washed or placed in plastic bags for 2 weeks. Students should not share hats, combs, brushes, or hair implements. Communal cushions, pillows, etc. should be bagged for at least 2 weeks or washed/dry cleaned.
5. In classrooms with an unusual clustering of head lice cases, the custodian will be notified by the school nurse or administrator to pay particular attention to careful vacuuming and cleaning for at least 2 1/2 weeks.
6. The school nurse will recheck students who have been treated periodically for presence of lice or nits to ensure eradication of the infestation, including 7-10 days after treatment.

Home Treatment

1. Advise parents/guardians to check their entire family for lice and nits regularly, especially after sleep-overs. It’s also important to be alert for the signs and symptoms which include intense head scratching.
2. If lice or nits are found in their child’s hair, they should comb out as many of the nits as possible using a fine toothed comb or tweezers and then use a special medicated shampoo that contains a pediculicide. These products can be purchased without a prescription at any pharmacy and at most grocery stores and should be used according to the package instructions. The student’s hair should not be shampooed with regular shampoo or excessively combed for several days after the application of the medicated shampoo. This will allow the medication to work and continue to kill the lice and nits. Use the medicated shampoo again in one week, if needed.
3. None of the treatments are 100% effective and it is very common for it to take a few weeks to completely resolve a head lice infestation. Remind parents to check all family members and treat those with any signs of head lice. For persistent cases that do not respond to 2 or 3 consecutive weekly treatments of the over-the-counter shampoo, prescription medications are available. Parents should contact their health care provider for more information.

4. Parents/guardians should be advised to wash bedding, towels, clothes and coats in hot soapy water. Drying these items in a hot dryer is recommended. Items which cannot be washed can be sealed in a plastic bag for two weeks. Carpets, upholstery and car seats should be vacuumed. Head lice do not live off of their hosts for more than a day or two, so excessive cleaning is not needed.

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