

Parent Information for Pediculosis (Head Lice)

Head Lice (Pediculosis)

Parents are the key to looking for and treating head lice! The Iowa Department of Public Health advises parents to spend 15 minutes each week on each child carefully looking for head lice or nits. Persons with nits within ¼ inch of the scalp OR live lice should be treated. Careful nightly use of a nit comb can potentially remove all lice and nits. Parents should teach children NOT to share hair accessories such as: hats, scarves, brushes, combs, and hair fasteners.

Students diagnosed with live head lice typically do not need to be sent home early from school; they can go home at the end of the day, be treated, and return to class after appropriate treatment has begun. Nits may persist after treatment, but successful treatment should kill crawling lice. Children can be excluded from school if live lice continue after a two week treatment plan is completed. Re-admittance of the child will be at the discretion of the school nurse in the building.

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.

"No-nit" policies that require a child to be free of nits before they can return to schools should be discontinued 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.*

Schools will not do mass screenings for head lice but instead will screen on an individual basis or by referral from parents/guardians, or school staff.

Families are responsible to carry out the treatment protocol including nit removal. It is also their responsibility to share information regarding lice exposure with school personnel and other close contacts as appropriate.

Source: cdc.gov/parasites/lice/head/schools.html

idph.iowa.gov