

Public Schools Branch

Pediculosis (Head Lice) Management Protocol

General Information

Head lice are tiny insects that live only on the scalp of human beings and are the size of a pinhead. They do not have wings so they cannot fly or jump, and they are not found on cats, dogs or any other household pets. The bites from head lice can cause itching and scratching. Scratching may cause sores which can get infected. Anyone can get head lice. School children get lice more than adults. When children play, their heads often touch. Lice crawl from head to head. Head lice can spread by direct head to head contact; however lice can live away from a human host for up to three days.

An **infestation** with lice is called pediculosis, and usually involves less than 10 live lice. Itching occurs if the individual becomes sensitized to antigenic components of louse saliva that is injected as the louse feeds. On the first infestation, sensitization commonly takes four to six weeks. However, some individuals remain asymptomatic and never itch. In cases with heavy infestations, secondary bacterial infection of the excoriated scalp may occur. Unlike body lice, head lice are not vectors for other diseases.

Based on the current medical research, it is essential that head lice be treated with two applications of an approved shampoo seven days apart. As long as the treatment has been administered properly, the presence of nits does not necessarily indicate an active infestation.

Additional information can be obtained from:

Public Health Services

1.0 RESPONSIBILITY

1.1 The Principal shall:

1.1.1 Ensure that all staff and parents/guardians are aware of the characteristics of pediculosis and the school procedures in this regard.

1.1.2 Ensure that the parents/guardians of students with an infestation are notified of the infestation and sent home for recommended treatment.

(See sample Letter of Notification of Head Lice)

1.1.3 Ensure that all parents/guardians of students in the class where an infestation has been confirmed are notified. (See sample Letter of Attention)

1.1.4 Inform their school supervisor of any chronic infestation cases that are affecting the education of students or when there is an infestation in more than half of a class.

1.2 Staff shall:

- 1.2.1 Be aware of the symptoms which might indicate an infestation among students.
- 1.2.2 Identify and report infestations to the principal.
- 1.2.3 Actively promote preventative practices to avoid further infestation.

1.3 The parent(s)/guardian(s) shall:

- 1.3.1 Be aware of the symptoms which might indicate an infestation.
- 1.3.2 Identify infestation of head lice and inform the school.
- 1.3.3 Ensure that proper and full treatment is taken:

- ✓ *Information for Parents and Caregivers/Head Lice* from the Canadian Paediatric Society.

- 1.3.4 Follow the Checklist for Treatment guidelines prior to my child's return to school.

1.4 Health PEI – Public Health Nursing shall:

- 1.4.1 Upon request, provide educational programming to schools on symptoms and treatments of pediculosis.
- 1.4.2 Upon request, provide educational programming to parents on symptoms and treatments of pediculosis.
- 1.4.3 With parents/guardians consent, inform the Superintendent or designate of any chronic infestation cases that are affecting the education of students.

2.0 PROCEDURE

2.1 Parents/guardians of students identified with head lice will be notified by the school by phone call and letter (Letter of Notification of Suspected Head Lice) and the student will be sent home for the recommended treatment. The parents/guardians will be provided with the *Information for Parents and Caregivers/Head Lice* from the Canadian Paediatric Society.

2.2 Parents/guardians are required to complete the first application of an approved treatment prior to the student returning to school.

2.3 Parents/guardians are asked to follow the Checklist for Treatment guidelines. The student can return to school following the first application of an approved treatment.

2.4 If the Principal has concerns that an individual case of head lice infestation is an indication of a larger concern in that family, the Principal may consult with the school's designated Public Health Nurse and/or Child and Family Services.

2.5 According to the school's pediculosis procedures, the Principal may designate resource person(s), who are available and trained to perform head lice checks in the school. **All volunteers must provide a Criminal Records Check (this must include a check for the vulnerable sector).**

2.6 A school may designate a specific day or days for screening all students for head lice, using trained resource persons.

2.7 All parents/guardians of students in a class in which a student or students are found to have head lice will be sent a letter informing them of that fact (Letter of Attention).

3.0 COMMUNICATION

3.1 In September, the school will communicate with parents the school's pediculosis procedure through the first newsletter of the school year and/or through the student handbook, or other means that the school deems appropriate. This information will include:

3.1.1 The current version of *Information for Parents and Caregivers/Head Lice* from the Canadian Paediatric Society.

3.1.2 A reminder to parents/guardians to take responsibility to check their child's hair frequently and on an ongoing basis.

3.1.3 A request that parents/guardians co-operate by administering approved treatments recommended by a pharmacist or medical practitioner when needed.

3.1.4 A reminder to parents/guardians to inform the school if their child has head lice.

3.1.5 A review of the need for trained individuals to assist in screening students for head lice. (Training is available through Health PEI – Public Health Nursing.)

4.0 ATTACHMENTS

4.1 Letter of Notification of Suspected Head Lice/ Checklist for Treatment Form

4.2 Letter of Attention

4.3 *Information for Parents and Caregivers/Head Lice* from the Canadian Paediatric Society

SCHOOL LETTERHEAD

Letter of Notification of Head Lice

Date:

Dear Parent/Guardian:

Head lice (pediculosis) have been found in your child's hair. Head lice do not cause a health problem but do need to be treated. An approved treatment (such as Nyda, R&C Shampoo, Resultz, or Nix) must be used before your child returns to school. Consult with your pharmacist or other medical practitioner about the best product to use. Your child's right to privacy, dignity, and cultural sensitivity will be respected.

To assist you, please read the attached *Information for Parents and Caregivers/Head Lice* from the Canadian Paediatric Society.

Information can be obtained from:

Health PEI – Public Health Nursing

(school to include local office coordinates)

Parents are asked to follow the Checklist for Treatment guidelines listed below.

Sincerely,

School Administrator

Checklist for Treatment

I have read the information provided.

I have used an approved lice treatment.

I have checked all family members, including adults, for live lice and treated if necessary.

I have washed and stored items such as hats, pillow cases, and stuffed animals in accordance with directions provided in the *Information for Parents and Caregivers/Head Lice* from the Canadian Paediatric Society.

I will be doing a daily head check for the next 10 days

I have planned a repeat treatment after 7-10 days, to kill any newly hatched lice.

You may wish to inform close contacts (ex. sports teams, playmates, sleepover friends) that your child has head lice.

SCHOOL LETTERHEAD

Letter of Attention

Date:

Dear Parent/Guardian:

A case of head lice (pediculosis) has been found in our school.

Please check your child's hair for lice and eggs.

Please refer to the attached document, *Information for Parents and Caregivers/Head Lice* from the Canadian Paediatric Society.

School children get head lice more often than adults. When children play, their heads often touch, allowing lice to crawl from head to head. Head lice can spread by direct head to head contact; however lice can live away from a human host for up to three days.

If you do find that your child has head lice, **please inform the school.**

Additional information can be obtained from:

Health PEI – Public Health Nursing

(school to include local office coordinates)

Sincerely,

School Administrator



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Head lice

Head lice are tiny insects that live on the scalp, where they lay their eggs. Head lice do not spread disease. Having head lice does not mean you are not clean.

What do head lice look like?

Lice have 3 stages – the egg (nit), the nymph and the adult.

- Nits are whitish-grey, tan or yellow ovals, approximately the size of a grain of sand. They stick to the hair close to the scalp and can look like dandruff. Nits hatch in 9 to 10 days.
- Nymphs are baby lice. They look like adult lice but are smaller.
- Adult lice are approximately the size of a sesame seed and are hard to see. Adult lice can live for up to 30 days on a person's head, but they die within 3 days away from the scalp.

How do they spread?

Head lice spread easily, especially where people are in close contact. They are very common among school-aged children or children attending child care.

- Head lice spread through direct hair-to-hair contact or indirectly by sharing things like hats, combs, hairbrushes and headphones.
- Head lice don't fly or hop, but do crawl very quickly.
- Head lice that live on people **can't** live on pets, such as cats or dogs.

How do you know you have head lice?

One of the first signs of head lice is an itchy scalp. But it is possible to have head lice without any symptoms.

If you think your child has head lice, check his hair for nits right away, then again after 1 week and after 2 weeks.

How do I check for head lice?

To confirm a case of head lice, you need to find **live** lice. Children can have a few nits without actually having a case of head lice. Usually children have no more than 10 to 20 live lice.

- Good lighting is important when you are checking.
- Head lice move fast and are hard to see. They are usually found very close to the scalp, at the bottom of the neck and behind the ears.
- To look for nits, part hair in small sections, moving from one side of the head to the other. Check carefully, looking close to the scalp.

How can head lice be treated?

Insecticides are chemicals that kill insects (bugs). In Canada, 3 insecticides are approved to treat head lice:

- pyrethrin (found in R&C Shampoo + Conditioner)
- permethrin (Nix Creme Rinse or Kwellada-P Creme Rinse)
- lindane (Hexit Shampoo or PMS-Lindane Shampoo).

Pyrethrin and permethrin are safe when used on humans. However, lindane can be toxic (poisonous).

Products with lindane should not be used on infants or young children younger than 2 years of age. You don't need a prescription for these products.

- Follow package directions carefully.
- Don't leave the shampoo or rinse in the hair longer than directed.

- Rinse hair well with cool water after the treatment. It's best to rinse over a sink, not in the bath or shower, so that other parts of the body don't come in contact with the product.

- Repeat the treatment after 7 to 10 days.

Sometimes, these treatments can make the scalp itchy or can leave a mild burning feeling. If your child is scratching after treatment, it does not necessarily mean the lice are back.

A noninsecticidal product called isopropyl myristate/cyclomethicone (Resultz) has also been approved for use in Canada, but it should only be used in children 4 years of age and older:

It works by breaking down the waxy exoskeleton ('skin') of lice. The lice get dehydrated and die.

- Apply to a dry scalp and rinse after 10 min.
- Repeat after 1 week.

Do not treat anyone with a head lice product unless you find lice in their hair. Check all family members if someone in the house has head lice.

What about other treatments?

- Some people use home remedies such as mayonnaise, petroleum jelly, olive oil, vinegar or margarine. Although these products may make it hard for lice to breathe, they probably won't kill them.
- There is very little evidence that wet combing works (removing lice by combing wet hair with a fine-tooth comb).
- There is no evidence that products such as tea tree oil or aromatherapy work to treat head lice.
- **Never use gasoline or kerosene.** These products can be extremely dangerous.

Should the house be disinfected if someone has head lice?

Because head lice don't live long off the scalp, there is no need for extra cleaning.

To get rid of lice or nits from items like hats or pillowcases:

- Wash the items in hot water and dry in a hot dryer for 15 min; **or**
- Store the items in an airtight plastic bag for 2 weeks.

Should children with head lice stay home from school?

Children with head lice should be treated and can attend school or child care as usual.

'No-nit' policies that keep children with head lice away from school are not necessary because:

- Head lice are common among young children.
- Head lice don't spread disease.
- Cases of head lice are often misdiagnosed.
- Children can have head lice for several weeks with no symptoms.

If your child has head lice, treat it. Teach your child to avoid head-to-head contact with other children until the lice are gone. Children should not share combs, hairbrushes, caps, hats or hair ornaments.

For more information

- Head lice infestations: A clinical update, a position statement by the Canadian Paediatric Society is available at <www.cps.ca/english/publications/InfectiousDiseases.htm>

This information should not be used as a substitute for the medical care and advice of your physician. All Canadian Paediatric Society documents are reviewed, revised or retired as needed on a regular basis. Please consult the Caring for Kids website (www.caringforkids.cps.ca) for the current version. May be reproduced without permission and shared with patients and their families.