



OSSINING HEALTH SERVICES

As recommended by the *National Association of School Nurses*, the best prevention of head lice is frequent screening, regardless of suspected contact with lice. Please allow this to serve as a reminder to regularly check your child for head lice and nits throughout the year.

Dear Parent or Guardian:



As you may know, head lice cases have been on the rise. An estimated 6 to 12 million infestations occur each year in the United States, most commonly among children ages 3 to 11. We are writing to help you learn how to identify lice and provide information on what you can do if lice hits your home. We expect that families who discover or are advised about live lice activity will treat their children appropriately. **Please check your child at home weekly and treat if necessary before sending to school.**

What are head lice?

Head lice are tiny, wingless insects that live close to the human scalp. They cannot fly or jump, they move only by crawling. They feed on blood. The eggs, also called nits, are tiny, tear-drop shaped eggs that attach to the hair shaft. Nits often appear yellowish or white, and can look like dandruff but cannot be removed or brushed off. Nits adhere to the hair shaft usually less than $\frac{1}{4}$ inch from the scalp. The nymph, or baby louse, is smaller and grows to adult size in one to two weeks. The adult louse is the size of a sesame seed and appears tan to grayish-white. An itchy and inflamed scalp is a common symptom of lice. Although not common, persistent scratching can lead to skin irritation and even infection.

Who is affected by head lice?

Head lice are not related to cleanliness. In fact, head lice often infest people with good hygiene and grooming habits. Infestations can occur at home, school or in the community. Head lice are mostly spread by direct head-to-head contact—for example, during play at home or school, slumber parties, sports activities, or camp. Less often, lice are spread via objects that have been in recent contact with a person with head lice, such as hats, scarves, hair ribbons, combs, brushes, stuffed animals or bedding. The best way for families to prevent infestation is to check their heads often and treat immediately when necessary. The sooner you find the infestation, the easier it is to treat.

What to do if an infestation occurs?

If you think your child has head lice, it's important to talk to a healthcare provider to discuss the best treatment approach for your family. Several medicated shampoos are effective at killing head lice. Products containing permethrin or pyrethrins are available over the counter and recommended by the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP). Treatment directions should be followed exactly as the label indicates. Re-treatment after 7-10 days is recommended to assure that no eggs/nits have survived. Nit combs are available to help remove nits from the hair. Do not treat an infested person more than 2–3 times with the same medication if it does not seem to be working. This may be caused by using the treatment incorrectly or by resistance to the medicine. Always seek the advice of your health care provider if this should happen. He/she may recommend an alternative treatment. There are also prescription treatment options available.

Machine wash and dry clothing, bed linens, and other items that the infested person wore or used during the 2 days before treatment using the hot water (130°F) laundry cycle and the high heat drying cycle. Clothing and items that are not washable can be dry-cleaned or sealed in a plastic bag and stored for 2 weeks. The risk of getting infested by a louse that has fallen onto a rug or furniture is very small. Head lice survive less than 1–2 days if they fall off a person and cannot feed; nits cannot hatch and usually die within a week if they are not kept at the same temperature as that found close to the human scalp. All household members should be checked, and those with evidence of an active infestation should be treated at the same time. There is no scientific evidence that home remedies are effective treatment.

Additional information is available at www.ossiningufsd.org under Health Services Department.

Sincerely,
Ossining School Nurses