

Head Lice (Pediculosis) Procedures

Background:

Missoula County Public Schools head lice procedures are based on current evidence based practices recommended by the Centers of Disease Control, the American Academy of Pediatricians and the National Association of School Nurses. These procedures were reviewed and updated in May 2016.

It is known that:

- Head lice have co-existed with humans for thousands of years.
- Head lice do not spread disease and/or illness and are not an indication of poor hygiene or parental negligence.
- Lice do not jump or fly, and will survive for only 24-48 hours off of the human head.
- Transmission of lice occurs with head to head contact, especially sustained contact, such as in the home environment. Transmission in the school environment is rare.
- Head lice are a community health issue; schools are a source of accurate information and often the place of identification.
- Lice lay eggs, commonly called nits on the hair shaft. Nits are “cemented” to the shaft, and are unlikely to be transferred to others, or hatch off of the human body.
- It is difficult to differentiate viable nits from egg casings without microscopic identification. The presence of nits alone does not confirm an active infestation.
- Head lice are not a valid reason for school exclusion and most students do not need to miss any school because of head lice.
- School procedures related to lice must be evidence based, thereby preventing perpetuation of harmful stigmas based on misinformation.
- Students and families benefit from accurate information and support.

Procedures:

- Parents and students may and staff should consult the school nurse for suspected cases of head lice.
- Requests for verification are not honored when made for a peer student or a student who is not that parent/guardian’s child.
- School nurses will confirm the presence of head lice in suspected cases. Because head lice are not a

health hazard, are unlikely to be transmitted in the school setting and if present, likely to have been present for several weeks in a child, confirmation will be timely but not necessarily immediate.

- School nurses will communicate with the parent of infested student if an active case of head lice is confirmed by the nurse. Emphasis is placed on giving parents accurate information. The student may return to class for the remainder of the day with the expectation that parents will provide treatment that day after school.
- Nurses will monitor students with known recent history of lice infestation.
- Students will NOT be excluded from school for the presence of live lice unless the nurse determines there is unusually high risk of transmission. There is no requirement to be nit free for school attendance.
- While staff often know that a student has/had head lice, it is generally not essential that staff know what students have head lice in order to employ standard preventative measures in the classroom.
- Students who miss school due to reported head lice should not have a specific absence code to reflect this.
- Nurses will collect statistical data for procedure evaluation purposes only.
- Nurses will protect confidentiality of students by providing private settings for examination of hair and discussion with student and parent to the extent the school environment allows.
- In order to further protect confidentiality of students, recognizing that transmission in the school setting is unlikely, and that head lice are not a health hazard, classroom letters will NOT be sent home notifying parents of identification of head lice in the school setting.
- Information will be made available, including on the district website, in order to promote accurate information and treatment.