

**Mobile County Public School
System
Health Services Department
Head Lice Protocol &
Guidelines**



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Introduction

Head lice are a fairly common problem in school age children. It is most prevalent among preschool and elementary school age children and their household members or caretakers. While head lice are a nuisance it does not pose a significant health hazard and is not known to spread disease. Head lice can be acquired anywhere in the community and may not be identified until weeks to months after exposure. Having head lice is not related to cleanliness of the person or their environment.

The most challenging aspect of head lice is not the condition itself but school staff and parent's reaction and emotions that occur when head lice is suspected. A lice infestation is made worse than it should be when parents, school and/or the community reacts with fear and anger, creating an environment of hysteria. This overreaction frequently creates anger directed towards parents and/or the school personnel and it often leads to teasing or alienation of the child, which can impact his or her self-esteem. Inappropriate management of head lice can also result in unnecessary absenteeism and may lead to improper treatment that could potentially be harmful.

Historically, in an effort to decrease head lice infestations, many U.S. schools adopted "no nit" policies. This type of policy leads to extended student absences related to chronic infestations in certain students. One study found 12 million to 24 million school days are lost annually in the U.S. due to excluding students with nits (Price, Burkhart, Burkhart, Burkhart, & Islam, 1999). However, research shows that the presence of nits does not indicate active infestations and do not lead to any disease process. The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends that classroom or school-wide screening should be strongly discouraged due to the lack of evidence of efficacy and instead suggests that schools help educate parents in diagnosing and managing head lice.

The Centers for Disease Control, the American Academy of Pediatrics, and the National Association of School Nurses all recommend that students not be excluded from school for having nits and that the management of head lice should not disrupt a student's educational process. The AAP further recommends that since a child with an active head

lice infestation has likely had the infestation for a month or more by the time it is discovered, poses little risk to others, and does not have a resulting health problem, he or she should remain in class but be discouraged from close direct head contact with others. If a child is assessed as having head lice, confidentiality must be maintained so the child is not embarrassed. The child's parent or guardian should be notified that day and educated on the prompt, proper treatment of head lice. The child should be allowed to return to school after proper treatment.

The information contained in this document was developed based on current research and knowledge obtained from guidelines set forth by the American Academy of Pediatrics, the Centers for Disease Control, the National Institutes of Health, and the National Association of School Nurses.

**Mobile County Public
Schools-Health Services
Department
Head Lice Protocol**

MCPSS recommends a protocol that focuses on minimizing the impact on classrooms and providing parents with information for the necessary treatment of head lice.

- **Any student with live lice or nits may remain in school until the end of the day (see Procedures). Immediate treatment at home is advised. The student will be readmitted to school after initial treatment and examination. If, upon examination, the school--designated personnel find no live lice on the child, the child may reenter the school. Parents should continue to check for and remove remaining nits.**
- **Any student with nits that have been treated within the last two weeks should be allowed to stay in school.**
- **Parents should remove nits daily and treat lice per the instructions provided (see page 7).**

Procedure

If a case of lice is suspected/found, the following procedures should be followed:

1. A nurse or trained designee from the school should check the child for headlice.
2. Once a case is confirmed, the school should call the parent and notify them of the head lice and the procedures to follow. It is preferable to have the parent/guardian pick up the child at school so information on procedures for treatment can be discussed. **Immediate removal of the child is unnecessary.** If a child has lice, they may have been infested for weeks and immediate removal of the child from the classroom could lead to embarrassment and ridicule. **Children can be sent home at the end of the day** and they should be allowed to ride the bus home. Transmission via school bus seats is not likely because of the biology of head lice.
3. The child with suspected head lice should be restricted from activities involving close contact (i.e. hugging) or sharing personal items (i.e. hats, clothing, brushes) with other children until treated.
4. If several cases of head lice occur in the same classroom the principal may choose to send a letter home notifying classmates' parents that a case of head lice is suspected and asking them to check all of their children for head lice.
5. All students in the classroom/grade **should not** be checked. Current evidence does not support the efficacy and cost---effectiveness of classroom or school---wide screening and can cause more harm than good given the psychological impact lice may have on a child.

Roles & Responsibilities

Parents have the ultimate responsibility for their children. This includes:

- Assisting in the prevention and management of head lice cases by regularly checking their children's hair and immediately treating when head lice is detected.

Schools have responsibility to:

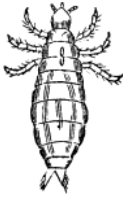
- Designate individuals who will be responsible to check students who are suspected of having head lice.
- Verbally notify parent if their child has head lice.
- Send home lice---educational materials with the student.
- Examination of student for re---admittance following treatment.
- Cleaning the environment (See "***Information for Schools -- Prevention and Control of Head Lice.***")
- Educate students on how to prevent transmission of head lice (See "***Information for Schools -- Prevention and Control of Head Lice.***")
- Maintain the confidentiality of each student and treat each family with respect.

School Nurses have responsibility to:

- Educate school administration and staff on lice protocol.
- Train designated school personnel on proper lice screening procedures.
- Communicate head lice resource packet with school personnel.
- Confer with parents at the request of the principal on recurrent, exceptional or challenging cases of head lice.
- Be available as a resource for questions or concerns.
- **Nurses may not be available for head lice screenings. Teachers/Staff should screen and refer to the nurse if they have a question about a case.**

Understanding Head Lice

- **What are head lice?**



Head lice are tiny, wingless, tan/brown insects that live and breed in human hair. They are about the size of a sesame seed. The eggs, called nits, are easier to see than the lice themselves. The nits are yellowish-white, tear-drop shaped, and are firmly attached at an angle to the hair shaft close to the scalp behind the ears and on the back of the neck. Dandruff, lint, and hair spray globules can easily be brushed from hair and can be mistaken for nits. Unlike dandruff, nits are difficult to remove and cannot be brushed away. Lice crawl slowly and cannot crawl long distances. **They do not fly, hop, or jump.** They survive by piercing the skin to feed on blood. Skin irritation at the feeding site causes itching. While head lice are a nuisance, they do not pose a significant health hazard and they are not known to spread disease.

- **How do lice spread?**

Lice are primarily spread by direct hair-to-hair contact, and less frequently through shared items such as combs, brushes, scarves, hats, headphones, sleeping bags, and stuffed animals. Lice may also be transmitted through shared bedding such as pillows, pillowcases, sheets, and blankets. Lice cannot survive away from the head for more than 24--48 hours. However, the nits can survive off the body for a week or more but in order to survive they must get back on the head soon after they hatch. You cannot catch head lice from or give them to pets.

- **How do you prevent head lice?**



- Teach children not to share combs, brushes, hats, and coats.
- Do not try on other people's hats (not even in department stores).
- Teach children to hang coats separately – placing hats and scarves inside coat sleeves.
- Check your child's hair if he/she itches or complains about itching.
- Getting rid of lice as soon as they are found can prevent them from spreading in your home.

- **How are lice detected?**

The first clue that a child has head lice is frequent scratching of the scalp. To check for infestation, carefully examine the hair around the back of the neck and behind the ears. Since head lice shy away from light, you may only see the eggs (nits), small whitish ovals of uniform size (teardrop shape) attached to the hair shaft.



- **How are lice treated?**

Successful treatment needs to concentrate on removing/killing lice on the child and on the removal of the nits.



Several products are available to treat head lice. These are either shampoos or cream rinses. Some can be purchased over-the-counter while others need a

prescription. These shampoos and rinses should not be used on infants because the medicine is absorbed through the skin and can affect the brain.

It is important to follow the instructions on the label exactly as they are written. Many of the treatments must be applied to dry hair to be effective. After the initial treatment, comb or pick out all the nits with a fine-tooth nit comb. Combing should be repeated daily until no lice or nits are seen. A second treatment is recommended 7---10 days after the initial treatment. Only those family members with lice or nits should be treated.



Do not use a cream rinse, combination shampoo/conditioner, or conditioner before using lice medicine. Do not re--wash the hair for 1-2 days after the lice medicine is removed.

- **How to treat the environment**

In addition to treating those with lice, the home also needs to be addressed by:



- Checking everyone in the household at the same time, prior to cleaning the environment.
- Washing clothing and bed linens in hot water. Items should be washed for at least 10 minutes at a water temperature of 130---140°F. Dry items on high heat for at least 30 minutes.
- Vacuuming your upholstered furniture, carpet, floors, stuffed animals, coat collars, hats, bare mattresses, car upholstery and child car seats. Soaking your combs, brushes, and hair accessories in boiling water for 10 minutes. If items cannot be exposed to heat, soak them in Lysol, rubbing alcohol or a pediculicide for one hour.
- Items that cannot be washed or vacuumed, such as stuffed animals, can be placed in a tightly closed plastic bag for 14 days at room temperature or 24 hours in below freezing temperatures.
- All of the above tasks should be completed on the same day for increased success in eliminating head lice.

Spraying or fogging a home with insecticides or pediculicides is NOT RECOMMENDED and may be harmful if used in a poorly ventilated area.

10 days to Freedom from Head Lice

DAY 1

- Notify or check all exposed friends and family members
- Treat only those who are infested with live lice or have evidence of nits
- Wash all bedding, clothing, and toys in hot water (130° F) and dry on high heat for 30 minutes. Items that cannot be washed should be stored in a tightly sealed garbage bag for 2 weeks or placed in a freezer for 24 hours.
- Vacuum all carpeting, furniture and car upholstery

DAY 2

- Vacuum
- Check all members of home for nits that may have been missed
- Comb/pick nits out of hair

DAY 3

- Vacuum
- Check all members of home for nits that may have been missed
- Comb/pick nits out of hair

DAY 4

- Vacuum
- Check all members of home for nits that may have been missed
- Comb/pick nits out of hair

DAY 5

- Vacuum
- Check all members of home for nits that may have been missed
- Comb/pick nits out of hair

DAY 6

- Vacuum
- Check all members of home for nits that may have been missed
- Comb/pick nits out of hair

DAY 7

- Vacuum
- Check all members of home for nits that may have been missed
- If nits or lice are still seen, repeat treatment if indicated by instructions

DAY 8

- Vacuum
- Check all members of home for nits that may have been missed
- Comb/pick nits out of hair
- If nits or lice are still seen, repeat treatment if indicated by instructions unless this was done on day 7

DAY 9

- Vacuum
- Check all members of home for nits that may have been missed
- Comb/pick nits out of hair
- If nits or lice are still seen, repeat treatment if indicated by instructions unless this was done on day 7 or 8

DAY 10

- Vacuum
- Check all members of home for nits that may have been missed
- Comb/pick nits out of hair
- If nits or lice are still seen, repeat treatment if indicated by instructions unless this was done on day 7, 8 or 9