

Let's Talk About Lice

Dear parents,

Realizing that it is a little bit horrifying when you discover that your student has lice, I want to provide you with the best information, from the latest evidence-based research on lice. Just a couple of years ago, we thought that we had to scour, clean, vacuum, sanitize, do 12 loads of laundry every day, and bag up everything that we couldn't sterilize for two weeks. The latest news is good! We don't have to do that anymore to effectively get rid of lice!

- Head lice survive for less than 24 hours away from the scalp.
- If a louse is removed from its host for more than 3 hours, it will be too dehydrated to feed even if reintroduced to a host, resulting in its death.
- The anatomy of a louse makes mobility nearly impossible on a flat surface. Vertical strands (hair) are necessary for a louse to move around.
- Eggs (nits) are glued to the hair shaft and cannot fall off or survive off the scalp.
- The best prevention is parent education and early detection.
- A scientific study in Australia has shown that even in preschools with high rates of infestations (20.9%), no lice were found on classroom floors or on inanimate objects.
- According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, checking entire classes has not been proven effective in decreasing the incidence of head lice at school.

So what can we do?

- Teach your student to avoid head to head or hair to hair contact.
- Never to share hats, brushes or hair accessories.
- Ponytails, buns, braids for girls with long hair.
- Check your student's hair weekly, paying special attention to the nape of the neck and behind the ears.
- Check out the Lice ID card on the HBCSD website to help identify what to look for.
- Call your school site Health Clerk for questions, information, or advice.

What if I find it??

- Shampoo with a lice killing product to kill live adult lice and immature lice (nymphs).
- Comb, comb, comb with a long tooth metal comb designed to remove nits. Be sure to use lots of conditioner/detangler when combing lice and nits off the head.
- If the first product did not work after following the directions, consider switching products, calling your doctor, or consulting with a lice removal service.
- Continue to comb every three days for the next two to three weeks. Be sure to use lots of conditioner/detangler when combing lice and nits off the head.
- Check all other members of the household and treat as needed.

What about cleaning the house?

- Remember, lice love hairy heads, not houses, so focus your valuable time and attention on your student's head and items that touch the head.
- Wash bedding initially. Dry for 30 minutes on high heat to dehydrate and kill lice.
- As long as live lice are found, dry pillow cases, sheets and towels in a hot dryer every morning for 30 minutes.
- Use a sticky lint roller fabric surfaces like couches and stuffed animals.
- Remove hair from brushes and combs and run through the dishwasher with the heated dry cycle or place in a plastic bag and put in the freezer over-night, for as long as live lice are found.

Your student may return to school after treatment and after being screened in the office prior to returning to class, to make sure the live adult lice are gone. Please bring the empty bottles to verify treatment. This is HBCSD Board policy. Although lice are a nuisance, they have not been shown to spread disease. Please feel free to contact Health Services if you have questions or would like additional information.

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Resources:

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Devore, C. and Shultz, G. (2015). *Head lice*, The Council on School Health and Committee on Infectious Disease, American Academy of Pediatrics. Retrieved from: <http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/pediatrics/135/5/e1355.full.pdf>

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Spear, Thomas, and Cahill (2002). *Head lice are not found on floors in primary school*. Australia and New Zealand Journal of Public Health. Retrieved from: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/12141614>

