HEAD LICE IN SCHOOL SETTING

Purpose

The purpose of this Procedural Guideline is to clarify the Nampa School District position on treating head lice in the school setting.

Scope

This protocol will apply to all school employees, nurses, students.

Protocol

Head lice can be a nuisance but they have not been shown to spread disease. Both the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) and the National Association of School Nurses (NASN) advocate that “no-nit” policies should be discontinued. Per the Center for Disease Control (CDC) 2010 guidelines, these “no-nit” policies should be discontinued for the following reasons:

• Many nits are more than 1/4 inch from the scalp. Such nits are usually not viable and very unlikely to hatch to become crawling lice, or may in fact be empty shells, also known as casings.
• Nits are cemented to hair shafts and are very unlikely to be transferred successfully to other people.
• The burden of unnecessary absenteeism to the students, families and communities far outweighs the risks associated with head lice.
• Misdiagnosis of nits is very common during nit checks conducted by nonmedical personnel.

A child found to have lice should remain in school until the end of the school day, then be sent home for treatment.

• Head lice checks will be performed as needed for individual students.
• A parent may not request a head lice check on another student or classroom.
• A teacher may request a head check for visible symptoms of scratching and discomfort, or for evidence of lice and nits for their student.
• The nurse will not do screening for the entire classroom.

If nits or lice are discovered:

• Contact parent/guardian to inquire if they have knowledge of lice and have instituted treatment.
• Upon parent request, inspect other siblings in your school.
• Provide educational resources to parent/guardian of student to assist in the elimination of lice. (See Appendix I below)
• Request parent of student contact the nurse the following day to report on home treatment and determine efficacy of this treatment. Call parent if no follow-up contact is made by them.
• Elementary and Special Needs classrooms should be provided with an informational letter regarding head lice if there have been confirmed cases in the classroom. These letters should only be sent if two or more cases are found in the same classroom, and only sent out once per trimester or quarter. (See Appendix II below)
• Returning student should be inspected by the school nurse or designee as soon as possible after returning to determine efficacy of treatment measure. If repeated treatment measures are not effective, the nurse will discuss other options for consideration.
• If the head lice infestation becomes chronic in an individual student a home visit by the school nurse may be required.

Rationale

Head lice screening programs have not had a significant effect on the incidence of head lice in the school setting over time and have not proven to be cost effective. Research data does not support immediate exclusion upon the identification of the presence of live lice or nits as an effective means of controlling pediculosis transmission. By the time a child with an active head lice infestation has been identified, he or she may have had the infestation for one month or more, and, therefore, poses little additional risk of transmission to others. Lice cannot hop or fly; they crawl. Transmission in most cases occurs with direct head to head contact of an infected individual. (Frankowski & Bocchini, 2010).

References/Resources


Appendix I

Nampa School District No. 131
619 S. Canyon, Nampa, ID 83686
Phone (208) 465-2700, Fax (208) 465-2715

Dear Parent or Guardian:

Your student was found to have head lice. The Nampa School District Protocol on head lice states that children be treated for head lice before returning to school. Treatment can be time consuming, but it is important to do all the steps completely. Please return with your child and they will be checked by the school nurse before going to class.

The treatment plan is outlined below:

1. Check everyone in your household for head lice including siblings, spouse, boyfriends, girlfriends, houseguests, and yourself. Look for tiny (about the size of a sesame seed) gray-brown insects. They lay eggs (called “nits”) on the hair. Nits are very small and are glued to the hair so they do not fall out. Most often they can be found around the ears and the back of the neck. Anyone you check that has lice or eggs, must be treated as well.

2. There are both over-the-counter and prescription medications available for the treatment of head lice infestations. The method of treatment used should be decided by the parents and their healthcare providers and/or pharmacist. They are available at any drug store or grocery store. Apply the lice treatment following the instructions on the bottle.

3. Combing is the most important part of the treatment. No treatment product will kill all the eggs. They must be removed to prevent getting lice again. A special comb for this is included with the lice treatment product. Place your child under a bright light, their hair should be wet or damp; drape a towel across their shoulders. Comb slowly and carefully, taking only a small amount of hair at a time. Be gentle, and comb the entire length of the hair starting right next to the scalp. Pin up the sections of hair as you clean them. The comb will take out many of the nits, but you may need to use your fingernails to get the rest. When you are done, have your child put on clean clothing, change your clothes, and vacuum up the area where you worked. Most treatments recommend you repeat them in 7 – 10 days. Continue to check the hair to ensure success.

4. Cleaning your home, clothes, and soft toys is next. Vacuum your house, sofa, chairs, and bed. Machine wash in hot water all bed linen and clothing that has come in contact with the infested person in the last two days. Dry in a hot dryer. Anything that came in contact with the infested head that cannot be washed or
vacuumed, needs to be sealed in a plastic bag for two weeks or dry cleaned. 
Wash all combs and brushes in the hottest possible, soapy tap water. Let them 
soak for thirty minutes. Boiling is not necessary.

5. After all infested people and the household has been treated, you may bring your 
child back to school. They will be examined on arrival for any further lice or nits. 
Do not use conditioner on the hair for the next ten days as it will interfere with the 
lice killing effect of the treatment you applied.

6. To prevent head lice in the future, instruct your children not to borrow or loan 
personal items, such as; combs, brushes, hats, towels, clothing, bike or football 
helmets, hair accessories, and pillow. At a sleepover the guests should bring 
their own pillow and sleeping bag.

If you have any questions regarding this please contact your school nurse. Thanks for your 
cooperation and hard work.

Appendix II

NAMPA SCHOOL DISTRICT 131

Dear Parent:

This letter is to inform you that a case of head lice (pediculosis) has been reported in 
your child’s classroom.

Head lice are small parasitic insects that are found on the scalp, frequently around the 
ears and at the back of the neck. They are not associated with uncleanliness or poor 
personal hygiene. Head lice cannot hop, jump, or fly, but can be transmitted from one 
person to another via direct head to head contact. Lice and their eggs, called nits, can 
be seen without the help of magnification. The adult louse is about the size of a 
sesame seed and is tan to grayish-white in color, sometimes taking on the color of your 
child’s hair. Nits are smaller and lighter in color. Unlike a flake of dandruff or dry skin, 
nits attach firmly to the hair shaft and cannot easily be brushed away.

Head lice are nuisance insects, not a disease. They are not associated with any illness, 
cannot transmit disease, and should not be considered a medical problem. Cases of 
head lice are not just school issues, but also community and home problems. It is a 
common misconception that head lice are easily transmitted in the classroom. Recent 
research indicates very few cases of lice are actually transmitted in the school setting.

Head lice need to feed on blood to live and will die within one to two days off the scalp 
of an infected individual.
Inspection of your child’s hair should be done at home on a regular basis. If you do find a case of head lice please treat before sending your child back to school. If you are not sure what to look for and need more information on how to identify lice or nits and how they are treated, please contact your school nurse as soon as possible. We are always willing to check your child or any other family member. Careful regular hair inspection at home for both live insects and nits, is the surest way to prevent recurrence. Please feel free to contact your school nurse with additional questions or concerns.

School Nurse:
Phone: