Managing Head Lice in the School Setting

Got a BUG?
What Is a Louse?
Pediculosis Capitis

- A small parasitic insect that lives on the scalp and neck hairs of a human host
- Has six legs with claw-like feet specifically adapted for holding onto human hair
What Do We Know About Head Lice?

- Do NOT have wings, therefore they do NOT fly
- CanNOT hop or jump
- ONLY crawl
What Do We Know About Head Lice?

- Require human blood to grow, develop and lay eggs (nits)
- Cannot survive more than a day or so without a blood meal
- Generally fewer than a dozen active lice on the head at any given time
What Do We Know About Head Lice?

- Do NOT discriminate among socioeconomic groups
- Are NOT a sign of poor hygiene, in fact they prefer clean hair
- Most commonly found in children 3-11 years of age
What Are Head Lice?

- NOT considered a medical or public health hazard by CDC
- Are NOT known to spread or transmit any disease or illness

YES, IT’S TRUE!!

YET it makes many people unjustifiably hysterical
Signs and Symptoms

- Most students with head lice have no symptoms.
- Some may experience itching from an allergic reaction from the bites or irritation from sores caused by bites.
The Life Cycle of Head Lice

Three Stages:
1. Nit (egg)
2. Nymph
3. Adult
Nit (louse egg)

- Oval in shape and very hard to see
- About the size of a knot of thread
- Are laid onto the hair shaft close to the scalp
- Take 8-9 days to develop and hatch
- Are not viable if further than ¼” from the scalp (transported away as hair grows)
- Often confused with dandruff, scabs or hair spray droplets
Nymph

- Immature stage of a louse
- Look like an adult, only smaller and are unable to reproduce
- Mature into adults about 9-12 days after hatching
- Must feed daily on human blood to survive and grow
Adult Louse

- Difficult to see - move quickly
- Size of a sesame seed
- Adult females live up to 30 days
- Feed once or more a day
- Will die within a day or so when off the head
- Lay about 6 eggs a day
How are Lice Transmitted from One Person to Another??
Transmission of Head Lice

- Head lice are acquired mainly by *direct head-to-head contact* with an affected person.
- According to CDC, most transmissions occur in the HOME environment (play groups, sleep-overs, camps, etc).
- Live head lice can transfer via recently used inanimate objects (such as combs, brushes, hair accessories and other such items) but this type of transmission is very rare.
Transmission of Head Lice

- Only LIVING LICE can transfer from one person to another
- Nits cannot be passed onto someone else
What Does the Literature Say?

- Remember: we need to base practices on current scientific evidence, not fear and hysteria
- The right thing may not necessarily be the easy thing
“One of the greatest harms associated with head lice is from well-intentioned but misguided use of caustic or toxic substances to eliminate the lice” (Harvard School of Public Health)

- Eggs by themselves without the presence of live lice do NOT indicate an active infestation
- Treatment should ONLY be carried out if live lice are present
National Recommendations for School Policy

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that no healthy child be excluded from or allowed to miss school because of head lice, and that “no nit policies” for return to school be discouraged.
National Recommendations for School Policy

The National Association of School Nurses state that nit-free policies disrupt the education process and should not be viewed as an essential strategy in the management of head lice.
The Center for Health and Health Care in Schools states “Children with nits do not pose an immediate risk to the health of others, therefore, excluding these children from school and requiring them to be treated with pesticidal product is probably excessive.”
The Fact Is.....

- Head lice infestations can have a considerable psychological impact on children and parents who may feel stigmatized and ostracized and creates an opportunity for students to be a target of bullying.
The Fact Is.....

Exclusion policies:

- Put children at an educational disadvantage through loss of valuable instructional time
- Cause parents to miss work and possibly lose income
Why NOT a No-Nit Policy??

- Such a policy has *not* been supported by research and is not recommended by experts.
- Misdiagnosis leads to the possibility of overuse of *pediculocides* and inappropriate exclusion from school.
Around the Nation

The Oakland Unified School District in Southern California did away with its lice policy altogether arguing that if there is no evidence that having strict criteria for checking for lice and controlling infestations in children does any good, then there is no need for a policy (*Time Magazine, July 2010*)
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- WHAT DOES THE NCSD POLICY SAY??
- IS IT ALIGNED WITH CURRENT BEST PRACTICES??
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WHAT DOES THE NCSD POLICY SAY??

- Interestingly, there is no policy, the “guideline” that is posted on the NCSD website:
  - excludes students from school the moment lice are found
  - requires proof of treatment with a lice shampoo prior to returning to school
  - directs parents to the CDC 2005 “Treating Head Lice” factsheet
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**IS NCSD POLICY AlIGNED WITH CURRENT BEST PRACTICES??**

- **In a word….NO!**
  - excludes students from school the moment lice are found – **NOT RECOMMENDED**
  - requires proof of treatment with a lice shampoo prior to returning to school – **THERE ARE MANY DIFFERENT WAYS TO EFFECTIVELY TREAT HEAD LICE**
  - directs parents to the CDC 2005 “Treating Head Lice” factsheet – **OUTDATED** (09/13/2013 most current)
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WHAT ELSE IS HAPPENING WITHIN NCSD??

- Classroom screenings are NOT conducted at the junior and senior high levels
- There have been head lice cases at the junior and senior high levels, however school staff were generally notified after the fact (by parents) and students were NOT excluded from school
What are Other Wyoming School Districts Doing?

Laramie County School District
Campbell County School District – contacted based on similar size and demographics

- Do NOT exclude students
- Do NOT have a “no-nit” policy
- Do NOT check classrooms
- Do NOT conduct mass screenings
- Do NOT contact parents of classmates found to have head lice

LCSD has had their protocol in place for the past 4 yrs and reports there have been no increase in the # of head lice cases
Putting It All Together

**UNJUSTIFIED RESPONSES:**

- Exclusion or quarantine from school
- Notification of classmates’ parents
- Mass screenings
- Restricted use of headphones or athletic gear (helmets)

One of the worst problems with head lice is adult attitudes
Putting It All Together

**RECOMMENDED RESPONSES:**

- Notify affected student’s parent at the end of the day of suspected head lice case
- Provide information on the biology of head lice and methods to eliminate head lice
Head lice education and resources are essential to helping correct misinformation and misperceptions

School nurses can help by:

- establishing supportive relationships
- preventing stigmatization in the schools and community
- maintaining privacy and confidentiality
- providing ongoing support and reassurance
THE SOLUTION....

NCSD can help by:

- supporting school nurses in educating parents, staff and the community
- providing time and resources for the creation and dissemination of head lice information
- adopting a current evidence based position statement for addressing suspected cases of head lice in the school setting (see handout)
Got Questions???
References


References

Parison J, Canyon DV. Head lice and the impact of knowledge, attitudes and practices – a social science overview. In: Management and Control of Head Lice Infestations. UNI-MED, Bremen, Germany, 2010:103-109.


Special thanks to Marjorie Cole, RN, MSN, Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services, School Health Program