



## Guidelines for Head Lice Symptoms and Treatment

Head lice are found worldwide. Having head lice is not a sign of poor hygiene and can affect people of any social or economic class. They are a parasitic insect that can be found on the head, eyebrows, and eyelashes of people. Head lice crawl-they do not hop or fly. They are spread by direct contact with the hair of another person-for example, head to head contact with someone who already has head lice. Although it uncommon, it can be spread by using brushes, hats, and clothing of infected persons. Head lice are not known to transmit any disease and are not considered a health hazard.

What does head lice look like? The head louse is usually found on the nape of the neck, and above and behind the ears. Louse eggs (nits) are usually about the size of a sesame seed and are clear to a reddish brown color. The crawling insect is usually light brown, can move very quickly throughout the scalp, and survives from sucking blood from the scalp. They cannot survive more than 24 hours off the human host.

Symptoms: A tickling feeling, or sensation that something is moving in the hair, itching of the scalp, and excessive scratching of the head. Sometimes sores on the head are observed from scratching so hard.

Diagnosis and Treatment: Parents can play a crucial role in determining whether or not their child has head lice and then carrying out the treatment of head lice. It is important to inspect the head of the child in good light. Lice are most commonly found on the nape of the neck and behind the ears. You may observe the crawling insect, or you may observe recently laid nits, which are usually firmly attached to a strand of hair within an inch from the scalp. If your child is found to have head lice, it is very important that all members of the family living in the home be screened as well.

If your child is found to have lice, consult your healthcare provider or your pharmacist to determine what treatment may be best for your child. When using an over the counter topical method, it is critical to follow the directions completely. There are prescription treatments, but you will need to get those from your child's healthcare provider.

### Removing Head Lice:

- Along with the treatment recommended, manual lice and nit removal is necessary. You may want to wear disposable gloves so not to transfer the nits under your fingernails. Steps to follow:
- Use a bright light or sunlight to inspect the hair, and you may need a magnifying glass.
- Remove tangles from the hair using a comb or brush.
- Divide the hair into many sections and examine each one, fastening them away from the rest of the hair.
- You will need a lice comb-one with stainless steel teeth 2-3 inches long-placed very close to one another. Take a one inch section of the hair and comb through it beginning at the very base of hair at the scalp to the end of the hair strands. Dip the comb into water after each section is combed. Continue combing each section until all is thoroughly checked. Clean comb after use.
- The child's hair needs to be checked and combed every day- for possibly 3 weeks.

## What to do within your home:

- Soak combs and brushes in hot water for at least 5 to 10 minutes.
- Wash clothes, bed linens and towels. Use hot water and dry on the hot cycle for at least 20 minutes.
- Items not washable may be sealed in a plastic bag for 2 weeks or dry cleaned
- Vacuum your home-upholstered furniture as well, and discard the bag.

## What happens when your child is found to have Head Lice at school?

If your child's teacher suspects that your child may have head lice, your child is asked to go to the school nurse. If the nurse finds that your child has live lice (crawling), the parent will be notified to come and get the student. A treatment needs to be performed at home, and once that is done, the child may return to school. **The student should not miss more than one day of school for this.** The nurse will need to check the student's hair upon their return, and our goal is to see an improvement in the condition of the head-no live lice, and less or no nits. If the condition of the head is not improved and it is concluded that no treatment was performed, the child will not be allowed to stay at school. GCSS does not have a "No Nit Policy," however, we would like to see an improvement in the state of the infestation and be assured that treatment is taking place. **It is critical-and the responsibility of the parent-to check the child's head for lice on a daily basis for up to 3 weeks-combing the hair with a lice comb, and if a lice treatment product is used, to follow the steps as directed.** The nurse will check the student again in seven days after their return to school.

If your child is checked by the nurse, but no live lice are found, the child may remain at school, and the parent will be notified that nits were observed and treatment needs to be performed when the child gets home.

If more than three students in the same classroom are found to have head lice on the same occasion, a letter will be sent home with classmates advising parents of the situation and asking for their help in examining their child at home for head lice and performing proper treatment if warranted.

In some cases, head lice can be difficult to control. It takes time and effort on the part of the parent to stay on top of it, maintaining diligence in the treatment process. Please don't hesitate to contact your school nurse with any questions or concerns.