

Dear Parent or Guardian:

As your child's school nurse, I want to make you aware of a "pesky" situation that impacts schools around the country, often as the school year begins. Pediculosis, or head lice, is a condition that each year affects approximately 12 million children between the ages of 3 and 12 years of age, and about 1 in every 100 elementary school children. Head lice are parasites that are generally found on the scalp around the ears, and at the back of the neck. The adult louse is about the size of a sesame seed, and can be the color of your child's hair. Eggs, or nits, are smaller and silver in color. They are oval in shape and cannot be easily removed from hair shaft.

Head lice are not a sign of poor hygiene and they do not spread from one child to another can occur during direct head to head contact or by sharing of personal items such as combs, brushes, caps or helmets. Please tell your child not to share any of these items at school. Many teachers tell the students to put their hats and gloves in the sleeves of their coats for safe keeping.

The most common symptom of head lice is itching and head scratching, particularly at night. Red bite marks or sores may also be noticed on the scalp. If you suspect that your child has head lice and you cannot determine if it is head lice, contact your healthcare provider for further instructions.

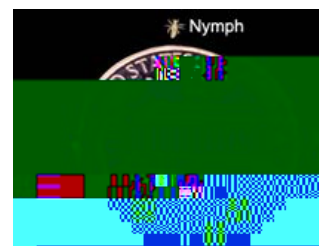


Table 1. Lice 101: Everything You Really Didn't Want to Know About Lice

Definitions	
Infestation = having an insect present, in this case, in your head	
Lice = more than one louse	
Louse = small insect that lives on the scalp	
Nits = eggs, dead or alive, of a louse	
Parasite = an organism that lives off another, in this case, lice surviving on the blood of humans	
Pediculosis = having an infestation of lice	
Myths	Truths
Lice are easy to get.	Lice are spread only by head-to-head contact. They are much harder to get than a cold, flu, ear infection, pink eye, strep throat, food poisoning, or impetigo.
You can get lice from your dog, guinea pig, or other animal.	Lice are species specific. You can get human lice only from another human. You cannot get another animal's lice.
Lice are often passed via hats and helmets.	Rare, but possible. Hairbrushes, pillows, and sheets are much more common modes of transmission.
School is a common place for lice transmission.	School is a VERY RARE source of transmission. Much more common among family members, overnight guests, and playmates who spend a large amount of time together.
Poor hygiene contributes to lice.	Hygiene makes absolutely no difference. Lice actually like clean hair more than dirty. You get lice by close personal contact with someone else who has lice, not by being dirty.
Lice can jump or fly from one person to another.	Lice can only crawl. They can neither jump nor fly. They must crawl from one person to another.
Any nits left in the hair can cause lice to come back.	Any nits farther away than one quarter inch to half an inch or more from the scalp are ALREADY HATCHED and pose no risk to others.

