

The Flu isn't the Only Bug Going Around this Time of Year!

Here is What You Need to Know About Head Lice:

What are head lice?

Head lice (pediculosis) are a parasitic insects that can be found on the head, eyebrows, and eyelashes of people. Head lice are a widespread nuisance condition that is common worldwide in school age children. An average of 500 cases of head lice are found among Anne Arundel County students each year.

What do head lice look like?

Head lice have three forms: the egg (also called a nit), the nymph, and the adult.



Eggs/ Nits: Nits are the tiny, grayish white eggs of the lice and are **one** sign of head lice. Nits attach to the hair close to the scalp and will not brush out like dandruff.



Nymph: A nymph is an immature louse that hatches from the nit. A nymph looks like an adult head louse, but is smaller. To live, a nymph must feed on blood. Nymphs mature into adults about 9–12 days after hatching from the nit.



Adult: The fully grown and developed adult louse is about the size of a sesame seed, has six legs, and is tan to grayish-white in color. To survive, adult head lice must feed on blood. An adult head louse can live about 30 days on a person's head but will die within one or two days if it falls off a person.

Are head lice a health hazard?

Head lice should not be considered a medical or public health hazard. Head lice are not known to spread disease. Head lice can be an annoyance because their presence may cause itching and loss of sleep. Sometimes the itching can lead to excessive scratching that can sometimes increase the chance of a secondary skin infection. Head lice are not a sign of poor hygiene or cleanliness in the home or school and they do not spread any diseases.

How do you know if a student has head lice?

The gold standard for diagnosing head lice is finding a live louse on the head, which can be difficult because lice avoid light and can crawl quickly. The nits, tiny eggs, may be easier to spot, especially at the nape of the neck or behind the ears, within 1 cm of the scalp.

What are the signs and symptoms of head lice infestation?

- Tickling feeling of something moving in the hair.
- Itching, caused by an allergic reaction to the bites of the head louse.
- Irritability and difficulty sleeping; head lice are most active in the dark.
- Sores on the head caused by scratching. These sores can sometimes become infected with bacteria found on the person's skin.

How is head lice spread?

Head-to-head contact with an already infested person is the most common way to get head lice. Head-to-head contact is common during play at school, at home, and elsewhere (sports activities, playground, slumber parties, and camp). Dogs, cats, and other pets do not play a role in the spread of head lice.

Head lice can also be spread by sharing clothing or belongings. This happens when lice crawl, or nits attached to shed hair hatch, and get on the shared clothing or belongings. Examples include:

- sharing clothing (hats, scarves, coats, sports uniforms) or articles (hair ribbons, barrettes, combs, brushes, towels, stuffed animals) recently worn or used by an infested person;
- head to head contact with an infested person (hugging, lying near each other, etc)

Can head lice be spread by sharing sports helmets or headphones?

Head lice are spread most commonly by direct contact with the hair of an infested person. Spread by contact with inanimate objects and personal belongings may occur but is very uncommon. Head lice feet are specially adapted for holding onto human hair. Head lice would have difficulty attaching firmly to smooth or slippery surfaces like plastic, metal, polished synthetic leathers, and other similar materials.

Do lice jump?

Lice do not jump, fly or live on pets but they can crawl **short distances** and move quickly.

How do you treat Head Lice and Nits:

1. General:

- It is important that all those with lice, close contacts and household and personal items be treated at the same time.
- **Check all members of the household and close contacts for head lice and nits.** Very close contacts such as those sharing the same bed should be treated even if no lice or nits are found. Call your doctor if you need to treat a child under the age of two.
- Over-the-counter as well as prescription shampoo treatments can be effective. You may wish to talk to your doctor or pharmacist about which treatment is best for your family. These shampoos will kill the lice but may not kill all of the nits. You may need to treat again in 7 to 10 days.
- Remove and wash all clothing right away. The medication should be applied while the person is in the bath or shower. Closely follow the directions on the medication. After treatment, dry with a clean towel and put on clean clothing. If you are shampooing several people, rubber gloves should be worn.

2. Getting rid of the nits, which is the hardest part of the treatment:

- Use a fine toothed, metal comb.
- A hot hair dryer or, if there are no scratches on the scalp, warm white vinegar combed through the hair will help loosen the nits.
- Pick the nits off the hair shaft with fingers or tweezers.
- Lice that have fallen or been brushed off their human host will die in 48 to 55 hours.
- Lice will die when exposed to extremes in temperatures.

3. **Cleaning all household and personal items that may harbor lice and nits:**

- Lice will die when exposed to extremes in temperatures.
- Combs and brushes can be washed with the shampoo, soaked in a 2% Lysol solution for one hour or washed with hot (125 degrees) soapy water for 5 to 10 minutes.
- Stuffed toys or other non-washable items may either be dry-cleaned or placed in tightly sealed plastic bags in a cool place (below 70 degrees) for 10 days.
- Towels, bed linens, pillows and clothing should be washed in hot soapy water and dried in a hot dryer for at least 20 minutes. Ironing with a hot iron will also destroy nits.
- Vacuum rugs, car seats, chairs, sofas and beds; then, throw away the vacuum bag.

How can parents prevent their student from getting head lice again (or How to Keep Lice from Getting Ahead):

- After each treatment, checking the hair and combing with a nit comb to remove nits and lice every 2–3 days may decrease the chance of self-reinfestation. **Continue to check for 2–3 weeks to be sure all lice and nits are gone.**
- Retreatment is meant to kill any surviving hatched lice before they produce new eggs. **For some drugs, retreatment is recommended routinely about a week after the first treatment** (7–9 days, depending on the drug) and for others only if crawling lice are seen during this period.
- Call the doctor if treatment isn't successful after two attempts.
- Call the parents of your child's closest friends, your child's school and those in charge of activities that may involve direct contact such as dancing classes or sports. Others may need to be treated to eliminate head lice and nits.
- **Tell children not to share caps, combs, brushes, and other personal items with their friends.**
- **Check for head lice once a week during peak lice periods**

How can we prevent the spread of head lice in schools?

Transmissions in schools are rare. It is more common to get head lice from family members, overnight guests, and playmates who spend a lot of time together. While it is probably impossible to totally prevent head lice, young children should avoid head-to-head contact with each other frequently. It is prudent for children to be taught not to share personal items such as combs, brushes, and hats. In environments where children are together, adults should be aware of the signs and symptoms of head lice infestation, and infested children should be treated promptly to minimize spread to others.

What is the Anne Arundel County Head Lice Policy?

Anne Arundel County has a No Live Lice Policy, in keeping with the recommendations of the American Academy of Pediatrics and the National Association of School Nurses. When students are found to have live lice or nits less than 1/4 inch from the scalp, the parent will be notified. The student can remain in school or day care until the end of the day and must be treated with an over-the-counter or prescription insecticide shampoo before returning. The recommendations are based on studies showing that:

1. Nits are difficult to identify accurately. Children can be misdiagnosed with nits, get treated and miss school unnecessarily.
2. Children with nits further than a 1/4 inch from the scalp are at low risk of reinfection.
3. Head lice, while a nuisance, are not a reason to exclude children from school, interfering with their opportunities to learn and achieve.
4. Letters are not sent to entire classes to notify of lice infestations

Should students with head lice be immediately excluded from school?

No. Because a child with an active head lice infestation likely has had the infestation for one month or more by the time it is discovered and poses little risk to others from the infestation, he or she should remain in class for the day but be discouraged from close direct head contact with others. If a child is diagnosed with head lice, confidentiality must be maintained. The child's parent or guardian should be notified that day by telephone or by having a note sent home with the child at the end of the school day stating that prompt, proper treatment of this condition is in the best interest of the child and his or her classmates. This guidance is based on the recommendations of the American Academy of Pediatrics and the National Association of School Nurses.

Whom do I contact if there is a head lice case in my school?

Contact your school nurse. The school nurse confirms the presence of head lice, documents the problem, contacts the parents and informs them of therapeutic treatment options, and educates and supports the student and family.

The school nurse also is responsible for providing education and anticipatory guidance to classroom teachers about head lice infestations, minimizing school absences, and stressing that transmission in the school setting is rare.

If there is a case of head lice, should the entire class be screened?

Screening entire classrooms is an unjustified response. Studies demonstrate that screening for head lice in schools does not decrease the incidence of head lice. Results of studies suggest that education of parents in identifying and managing head lice is more effective and that class wide or school wide screening should be discouraged.

When can a student return to school?

- A student **MUST** be free of live lice.
- A student must be checked by School Health staff upon returning to school.