Managing Head Lice in the School Setting

PRESENTED BY:
Natrona County School District Nurses

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What Is a Louse?
Pediculosis Capitis

- A small wingless 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 two 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
- Most commonly found in children 3-11 years of age
What Do We Know About Head Lice?

- CanNOT give or get head lice from your pets or other animals
- Animals do get lice specific to their species, but NOT human head lice
What *Are* Head Lice?

**They are a nuisance!**

- The are **NOT** considered a medical or public health hazard
- They do **NOT** 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, tickling, and irritation from sores (from scratching), and difficulty sleeping (more active at night)
- Often identified first by the school nurse
Three Stages:

1. Nit (egg)
2. Nymph (adolescent)
3. Adult

A person has generally had head lice for 30 days by the time it is discovered.
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 6-10 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 (adolescent)

- Immature stage of a louse
- Look like an adult, only smaller and are unable to reproduce
- Molt three times before maturing into an adult at around day 17-18
- 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 for around 30 days
- Feed once or more a day
- Will die within a day or two when off the head
- Lay an average of 6 eggs a day
- Only fertilized eggs can hatch
How are Lice Transmitted from One Person to Another??
Transmission of Head Lice

- Head lice are acquired mainly by prolonged *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 LIVE CRAWLING LICE can transfer from one person to another.
- Nits (eggs) can NOT be passed onto someone else (they die once off the human head).
- Cutting or shaving a child’s hair is unnecessary, can cause shame, and can be emotionally damaging.
Transmission of Head Lice

- Head lice are harder to get than a cold, the flu, ear infections, and strep throat
- Transmission of head lice is rare in schools
- The length of a person’s hair does not impact his/her risk of getting head lice
“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)

- Head lice are OFTEN MISIDENTIFIED
- Eggs by themselves without the presence of live crawling lice do NOT indicate an active infestation
- Treatment should ONLY be carried out if live crawling lice are present
Head Lice Were Identified, Now What?

TREAT the affected person(s)

- Effective Treatments Include:
  - Use of a head lice comb to manually remove live lice and nits
  - An FDA approved over the counter head lice shampoo
  - A prescription medication from a health care provider

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) there is no scientific evidence that home remedies are effective.
Head Lice Were Identified, Now What?

CLEAN around the home

*Items in contact with the head of the person with lice in the previous 24-36 hours prior to treatment should be cleaned*

- Vacuum floors and furniture
- Recently used linens, towels, clothing, hats and other personal items like brushes, combs, and hair clips should be washed in very hot water and dried
- Items that can’t be washed can be sealed in a plastic bag for a 2 weeks
- **DO NOT** use pediculicide spray; it is not necessary and should NOT be used
Head Lice Were Identified, Now What?

SHARE the information with

- Your child’s school nurse
- The parent’s of other children your child may have come into contact with
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.

“Some kids have head lice, so this monster showed up.”
Putting It All Together

One of the worst problems with head lice is ADULT ATTITUDES.
THE SOLUTION....

YOU can help by:

- Discouraging prolonged direct head-to-head contact
- Discouraging sharing of inanimate objects such as pillows, brushes, combs, hats, scarves etc
- Maintaining the affected student’s privacy and confidentiality
- Preserving the affected student’s dignity
Got Questions???

■ Contact the school nurse
■ Additional information and are resources available on NCSD’s webpage


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