HEAD LICE GUIDELINES

Pediculosis, or head lice, are tiny parasitic insects that survive by feeding on human blood. Per the American Academy of Pediatrics: “Head lice are not a health hazard or a sign of uncleanliness and are not responsible for the spread of any disease”. The primary goal of identification and notification of a lice infestation in the school setting is to ensure that the child receives safe and effective treatment. Parents and/or guardians have the responsibility to treat this infestation. Current research DOES NOT support the conclusion that enforced exclusion policies has resulted in reducing the transmission of head lice. In fact, The American Academy of Pediatrics and the National Association of School Nurses do not advocate “no-nit” policies.

One of the goals of MSD of Lawrence Township is to promote academic achievement. Consistent attendance is critical to the accomplishment of this goal.

PEDICULOSIS-HEAD LICE

Head Lice: What are they? A head louse is an insect that lives on the human scalp and feeds on blood. Head lice hatch from small eggs (nits) that are attached with a cement like substance to the shaft of individual hairs. Eggs hatch in about 10 days. Once hatched the head louse matures in less than 2 weeks. Female head lice may survive for as much as a month (most seem to perish sooner). Those more than about 2 weeks old increasingly become geriatric and tend to produce fewer eggs and less viable eggs. If nits are present, head lice have already been there but may be long gone. Rarely more than 12 live lice on head at one time. Most head louse infestations seem to cause little, if any, direct harm. The greatest harm associated with head lice results from the well-intentioned but misguided use of caustic or toxic substances to eliminate the lice.

Head Lice: Historical Perspective

Lice have been our companions since ancient times and have so befriended us that they can not live without us.

Lice likely co-evolved with people; claws are well adapted to grasping the hair shaft. They don’t jump or fly.

Lice are host specific so human lice do not live on other animals.
Lice must feed off the scalp, so they die within 24 to 48 hours of separation from their human host. The majority of lice survive only hours once they are separated from their human host.

**Head Lice: How do we get them?**

*The most common means of transmission is through physical/direct (head to head) contact!!*

Indirect transmission is uncommon but may occur via shared combs, brushes, hats and hair accessories that have been in contact with an infested person.

Rarely through shared helmets – do not live on helmets alone.

Schools are not a common source of transmission.

A child cannot “catch nits.” Nits (lice eggs) can only be laid by live lice.

**GUIDELINES**

MSD of Lawrence Township will follow the following scheme for managing presumed head louse infestations in the school setting.

To better manage and to limit the spread of head lice infestations, school employees should report all suspected cases of head lice to the school nurse. The school nurse shall examine the student in a confidential manner. An infestation shall be determined by looking closely through the hair and scalp for viable nits or live louse.

If nits are found but there are no live (crawling) lice on the hair, the school nurse or designee may reinspect within 7-10 school days.

Parent/guardian of the student shall be educated concerning ongoing scalp inspection at home if nits are within ½ inch of the scalp.

If live (crawling) lice are found on the scalp, the parent/guardian shall be notified via phone of infestation. If the child has live (crawling) lice whether to send the child home will be at the discretion of the school nurse or a school administrator. The decision on whether a child needs to be picked up should be based on the severity of the infestation, the age of the child, or other health concerns associated with the child.
If the child remains in school he/she should be discouraged from direct head to head contact with other students.

Affected students will be permitted to return to school the next day after verification of proper treatment.

The parent/guardian will be instructed in methods of elimination of infestation focusing on live (crawling) lice and manual removal. The parent will be instructed to continue daily combing until no live lice are discovered (approximately 11/2 weeks).

The parent will be given the option to use pediculicides if they choose to use as an adjunct to manual removal.

Notification by note shall only be done if phone contact can not be accomplished.

Confidentiality should be maintained.

Head lice screening programs have not been proven to have a significant effect on the incidence of head lice in the school setting over time and are not cost-effective. (American Academy of Pediatrics)

Lice Facts from the FDA