

Head Lice: Frequently Asked Questions

Edina Public Schools Health Services follows the recommendations of Hennepin County Community Health Department for control and prevention of the spread of head lice. Their recommendations are evidence based and reflect the recommendations of the Minnesota Department of Health.

What are head lice? They are very small brownish insects that live on the head. Head lice are less than 1/8 inch long and they lay eggs (nits) very close to the scalp. The eggs are smaller than a sesame seed and gray or white in color.

How are head lice spread? Anyone can get head lice. They are most commonly spread by direct head to head contact with the hair of a person that has active head lice. Head lice do not live longer than 48 hours off of the head. Nits (eggs) do not hatch if they fall off the head. Spread by student head contact with personal belongings such as combs, brushes, headbands, and hats also may occur. Spread by contact with personal belongings is more common when the item has been worn by an infested person in the past 48 hours.

Can my child get head lice by sitting in the same room as a student with head lice? Head lice do not jump or fly. They crawl and can fall off of the head. Head lice do not live longer than 48 hours off the human head. They only lay nits while on the head. Nits which are more than ½ inch from the scalp are dead or empty and will not hatch. The nits do not hatch if they fall off the head.

How do I know if my child has head lice? You may see your child itching their head or neck. It is important to look for crawling lice in the hair and nits glued to the hair. Often nits are found behind the ears and at the back of the neck along the hairline. If you see something moving on your child's scalp, this is most likely to be a head louse.

How can I tell the difference between head lice and dandruff or dry skin? You can brush dandruff and dry skin from the scalp or hair strand. Nits must be pulled from the hair because they are attached to the hair with a glue-like substance.

What do I need to do if my child has head lice? It's important to treat your child for head lice and remove nits. You need to check your child's head daily for two weeks to remove lice and nits. Check other family members for head lice and nits. Treat only children and adults who have head lice. Call your health care provider for advice regarding the choice of lice killing product. Follow the product directions carefully. With certain products a second treatment is recommended 7-10 days later. Do not re-treat earlier than the product instructions recommend. **Please notify the school health office that you have treated your child for head lice.**

When can my child return to school? Students may return to school after treatment for head lice and no live lice are found. You will need to check your child's head every day for 2 weeks after treatment to make sure that the head lice are gone. This is an important step in preventing the spread of head lice. **Can head lice be spread by sharing headphones?** According to the Centers for Disease Control, head lice are spread most commonly by direct contact with the hair of an infested person. Spread by contact with non-living 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.

When will the school check students in the classroom for head lice? When there are 2 or more cases in a classroom within a 2 week period, the health services staff will check the classroom. There may be exceptions in selected situations based on nursing judgment.