

## **FACTS ABOUT HEAD LICE FOR PARENTS/GUARDIANS**

### **From SCSD Department of Health Services**

Listed below are several facts about head lice that will help you understand what these insects are and how an infection may be spread. The facts may help you understand how to manage this problem at home.

- 1) Head lice are tiny wingless insects that live in human hair. They hatch from small eggs, called nits, which are attached to the base of individual hairs. The nits hatch in ten days and reach adulthood in about two weeks. As the louse feeds on its host, it injects saliva into the wound resulting in local irritation and itching.
- 2) In their early stages, lice are very difficult to see because they are a neutral color and often blend into the hair. Often, their eggs (or “nits”) are easier to see and appear as small white specks on individual hair shafts. These specks can be confused with dandruff but they are more difficult to remove because they are attached to the hair with a strong glue-like substance.
- 3) Lice come from a family of parasites that must stay on their host to survive. If they are off the body from two to five days, they die.
- 4) Direct head-to-head contact is by far the most common means of transmission. They do not have wings nor the leg mechanisms necessary for jumping. Head lice do have six short legs that enable them to crawl very quickly.
- 5) There is a small chance that inanimate objects (rugs, toy, stuffed animals, school buses, backpacks) may be the source of head lice transference. However, remember that a louse who is not attached to a person will die after 2-5 days.
- 6) Lice can be found on persons of any age, race, sex, or socioeconomic class. Lice do not discriminate and actually prefer clean hair to dirty hair because it’s easier for the egg to be cemented to the hair shaft.
- 7) Lice can infest people with any length of hair. Cutting or shaving the hair is not necessary. Shampooing the hair with medicated shampoo is necessary as well removing nits by thorough combing with a lice comb or manually removing them with your fingers.
- 8) Dead nits can remain attached to the hair shaft for months because they are secured with a waterproof, cement like substance. Treatment is warranted only when active lice or viable eggs are present. No one should be treated “just in case”. This leads to potential resistance of head lice to chemicals in treatment but shampoos containing insecticides can be toxic and may cause real health problems.

Treatment:

- 1) Should only take about 1 hour. Careful removal as many nits as possible is very important.
- 2) Follow the directions on the label very carefully.
- 3) Retreat in exactly 10 days after the initial application.
- 4) **If you child has a case of head lice, please follow the Guidelines on the back of this form for complete instructions on what to do at home and what you'll need to do when your child returns to school.**

Please feel free to contact your school nurse directly or Health Services @ 435-4145.