

Nurse's Corner

Spirit Lake Community Schools

Spirit Lake School Nurses are committed to promoting the health and well-being of all students so that they may achieve academic success and develop lifelong healthy habits!

The Facts of Lice

What are head lice?

Lice are a parasitic insect that can be found on the head. They feed on human blood and can be found close to the scalp.

Who gets head lice?

In the US, head lice are most common amongst preschool and elementary school students... but anyone can get head lice!

How does head lice spread?

- Head lice move by crawling- they cannot jump or fly! Head lice are spread by direct contact with the hair of an infested person. Anyone who comes in head-to-head contact with someone who already has lice is at the greatest risk.
- It is uncommon for head lice to spread by contact with clothing (such as hats, headbands, coats) or personal items (such as brushes, combs).
- Personal hygiene has nothing to do with who gets head lice.
- Cleanliness in the home/school has nothing to do with who gets head lice.
- Having head lice is not a sign of poor hygiene or unclean surroundings. In fact, head lice actually prefer clean hair to attach and lay their eggs.

What do head lice look like?

There are 3 stages in the lice life cycle: nits (eggs), nymphs, and adult lice.

1. Nits (eggs): clear or whitish bumps that attach to the hair shaft close to the scalp. Very small, often mistaken for dandruff but they do not brush off like dandruff- clings to hair!
2. Nymphs: Brownish in color. After a nit hatches, it becomes a nymph. It takes 1 week to become an adult louse.
3. Adult lice: Size of a sesame seed, tan to grayish in color. Can live 3-4 weeks. A female louse lays 6-10 eggs per day. Moves very quickly by crawling.

Head lice do not carry disease in any stage of life!

How do I get rid of lice?

Treatment of lice is necessary to ensure that all lice have been eliminated. Consider these methods:

- OTC Lice-killing shampoos (pediculicide): There are several brands designed to kill adult lice. They do not kill nits (eggs) so you will need to repeat treatment in 7- 10 days.
- Comb hair with a very fine-tooth comb: Comb every 2-3 days to remove nits and lice after shampooing. Wipe comb on a white paper towel after combing each small section of hair.
- Soak combs and brushes in hot, soapy water after each use.
- Wash bedding, clothes, towels, clothes in hot, soapy water and dry on high heat-temperature >130 degrees can kill both lice and nits. Store items that cannot be washed in an airtight bag for 1 week. It is uncommon to spread lice through clothing but preventative measures may help prevent recurrence.
- Prescription treatment: If OTC shampoos do not work, talk to your healthcare provider about prescription treatment for lice
- Head lice clinics: Head lice clinics specialize in lice removal. Closest clinics are located in Mankato, Sioux Falls, Minneapolis, and Des Moines.

What can I do to prevent lice?

- Avoid head-to-head (hair-to-hair) contact with others during play at home, school, and elsewhere such as sports activities, sleepovers, and camps.
- Do not share hats, scarves, barrettes, hair binders, brushes, combs, or towels.
- Tea tree oil has been found to be a strong preventative to lice. Consider adding tea tree oil to your shampoo or purchasing tea tree oil hair care products.
- Carefully inspect your child's hair every week with a fine-tooth comb to check for lice. Pay particularly close attention to the nape of the neck and behind the ears.

Per recommendations from the National Association of School Nurses (NASN), the Iowa School Nurses Association (ISNA), and the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), lice notification letters will no longer be sent from the school. Lice are a nuisance but do not spread disease and do not pose a health risk. Please contact your school nurses with any concerns or questions you have - we are here to help you!

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