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HEAD LICE FACT SHEET (Rev. September 2016)

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) released a clinical report regarding the subject of head lice in May 2015. Head lice (pediculosis) are a common and recurring nuisance among school age children and have been around since antiquity. Head lice infestation causes a high level of anxiety. The recent position statement released by the AAP serves to update schools, parents, and clinicians on the identification and treatment of head lice. The AAP state that head lice are not a health hazard or a sign of poor hygiene and are not responsible for the spread of any disease. As we summarize the recent position statement from the American Academy of Pediatrics, Kirby School District 140 strives to be most helpful to parents by making available accurate information about the diagnosis, treatment, and prevention of head lice in an understandable format for the entire school community.

Facts:

- Lice cannot hop or fly, they crawl.
- **Transmission in most cases occurs by direct contact with the head of an infested individual. Indirect spread through contact with personal belongings of an infested individual (combs, brushes, hats) may also occur but is rare.**
- The gold standard for diagnosing head lice is finding a live louse on the head.
- Nits, which are lice eggs or empty egg casings, should not be confused with live lice. Nits aren't necessarily a sign of live lice infestation, and can sometimes be confused with dandruff or other hair debris. The adult head louse is about the size of a sesame seed and is usually tan to grayish-white. Nits are firmly attached to the hair shaft and can't be blown off; rather, they must be picked off with a fine toothed comb. In general, eggs or nits found more than 1 cm from the scalp are unlikely to be viable.
- **Parents / guardians are encouraged to check their children's heads for lice regularly and whenever the child is symptomatic; has an itchy scalp. The AAP suggests that children be taught not to share personal items, such as combs, brushes, and hats. Parents / guardians are encouraged to check their child's head before and after attending camps or sleepovers. The AAP states that school screenings do not take the place of these more careful parental checks.**

Tips for combing out head lice and nits:

- Use a fine-toothed louse or nit comb. These combs may be included within packages of medicated head lice treatment or you may buy one from most drug stores. Combs with metal teeth spaced close together seem to work best. Sit behind your child, and use a bright light (and magnification if needed), to inspect and comb through the hair, one small section at a time. Repeat combing until no more active lice are observed. **Comb daily until no live lice are discovered for two weeks. It may take several hours each night for several nights to tackle the problem. Parents/ guardians are advised to consult with their health care provider.**

- Combs, brushes, hats and other hair accessories in contact with an infested person should be washed in hot water each day to dislodge any lice or nits.

Treatment of clothes and other items:

- **A clothes dryer set at high heat** will kill lice or their eggs on pillowcases, sheets, nightclothes, towels and similar items your child has been in contact with during the previous two days such as stuffed animals. Lice and their eggs do not live more than one to two days off the head.

Cleaning the house and car:

- Once lice fall off of the head, they usually die within a day and eggs generally cannot live much longer. Thoroughly vacuuming the house and furniture is all that is really necessary for cleaning the home. A major cleaning effort will do little to further eliminate head lice.
- Insecticide treatments for the home, vehicles, or carpets and furniture are not needed and unnecessarily expose family members to the insecticides.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) <http://www.cdc.gov/parasites/lice/head/schools.html>

Clinical Report: HEAD LICE, American Academy of PEDIATRICS Volume 135, number 5, May 2015

National Association of School Nurses. (2016). *Head lice management in the school setting* (Position Statement). Silver Spring, MD: Author.