

Natick Public Schools - Health Services

Dear parent/guardian,

We've experienced some cases of head lice at our school. Do not be alarmed, as this is a common occurrence in schools. Head lice are not a sign of unclean people or homes.

Please take these precautions:

- Check your child's hair for eggs (also called nits) – If you suspect your child has head lice, ask your healthcare provider to diagnose and recommend appropriate treatment
- Inform the school nurse if your child has been diagnosed with lice - do not return your child to school until he/she has been treated (our school district requires that the school nurse check the child to assure they are nit free before returning to school)

Information about head lice:

What are they? Head lice are the tiniest insects that live only on people's scalp and hair. They hatch from small eggs (nits) that are firmly attached to the individual hairs near the scalp and cannot easily be moved up and down the hair (as can specks of dandruff). They look like grains of sand. Nits may be found throughout the hair, but are most often located at the back of the scalp, behind the ears, and at the top of the head. The eggs hatch in about 10 days, with new lice reaching adulthood in about 2-weeks. The female louse, about the size of a sesame seed, can live for 20-30 days and can lay about 6 eggs a day. The lice live by biting and sucking blood from the scalp. Lice can survive up to hours between feedings and can do so off the body. Until a person with head lice is treated they can be transmitted to others.

How should you check for head lice? You probably will not see the lice, only the eggs. These are tiny, pearl-grey, oval-shaped specks attached to the hair near the scalp. Look carefully, using a magnifying glass in natural light. Search for nits at the back of the scalp, behind the ears, and at the top of the head.

How does a person get head lice? Anyone who has close contact with an infested person or shares personal items may become infected. Lice are spread only by crawling from person to person directly or onto shared personal items, such as combs/brushes, head coverings, clothing, bedding, or towels.

What should you do about head lice? If your child has head lice, your health care provider may want to treat everyone in your family. Everyone should be checked, and anyone with nits should definitely be treated.

To get rid of lice:

- Use a medicine that your health care provider prescribes or recommends. Use the products very carefully, and consult a physician before treating infants, pregnant or nursing women, or people with extensive cuts or scratches on the head or neck.
- After appropriate treatment, removal of nits is necessary to prevent spread. Removal is a difficult process because nits have a firm grip on the hair. A solution of vinegar and water may help to loosen nits so you can remove them with a special, fine-toothed, nit-removal comb.
- Check for nits for the next 10-14 days. Repeat treatment to kill any newly hatched lice.
- Clean personal items and surroundings:
 - Machine wash all washable and possibly infested items in HOT water, then dry in a HOT dryer
 - Put non-washable items (furry toys, pillows) in a HOT dryer for 30 minutes
 - Seal items that cannot be washed or dried in a plastic bag for 14 days (any eggs or lice present will die in this time)
 - Soak combs and brushes for 60 minutes, or wash them with a shampoo approved for killing lice
 - Thoroughly vacuum rugs, upholstered furniture, and mattresses
 - Do not use insecticide sprays because they can be harmful to people and pets

NOTES SENT IN FOLLOW UP TO THE OCTOBER 2008 PTO MEETING

We have decided to periodically update Johnson families about topics of interest which were discussed at PTO meetings. We realize that with busy schedules everyone who may have wanted to attend our PTO meetings may not be able to, but in this way we can reach out and provide important information to our Johnson families. At our recent PTO meeting, Jen Hartigan, a registered nurse and lice specialist attended and gave us some tips and information about lice that we would like to share.

Commonly, back to school tends to be a time where schools notice an increase in reported cases of head lice. This year has been no exception with many cases of head lice reported at Johnson School (and other schools throughout the district). There are several things we can do to empower our families and ensure that any outbreaks are minimalized. We would like to share certain tips that Ms. Hartigan suggested that will help stop the spread of head lice in our school:

- 1.) Parents should be doing a precautionary combing of their children's hair once a week for about 5-10 minutes a session with a metal lice comb (these can be purchased through Ms. Hartigan for \$15 or they are also available at CVS for \$9.99 for a pack of two). The following technique was suggested by Ms. Hartigan: comb the hair from the root to the end. After each combing, slide your finger along the comb over a white towel or paper towel. If there are no eggs or lice, then continue with the once a week check. If eggs show up on the towel (little brown spots) you need to comb your child's hair twice a day, every day, for approximately 5 to 10 minutes for at least the next three weeks (until there are no more eggs). If you find a live nit or full grown lice then, you may need to treat your child with any of the over the counter products available, do a full out combing of the hair (which will take anywhere between 2 to 4 hours depending on the hair) and continue to comb the child's hair every day, twice a day, for at least three weeks until all evidence of the lice (including the nits) are gone. When the lice is entirely gone you should go back to the precautionary once a week check.
- 2.) Please have girls with long hair keep their hair pulled back, and remind your children that they may want to find other ways to show affection besides hugging (how about a nice air hug?) especially since lice are spread by direct contact with an infected individual.
- 3.) Ms. Hartigan suggested that some sprays may help stop the spread of lice, especially the ones with the scent of mint or lavender (but again she did note that the most effective way to stop the spread of lice is the combing described above).
- 4.) In the classroom, please have your children keep their jackets/sweatshirt inside their backpack. Do not share hats, hair brushes etc.

*We do have a packet of information that was provided to everyone at the meeting by Ms. Hartigan with many other "lice details". If you are interested in receiving a packet please let us know!

As Ms. Hartigan reminded us, it is up to us as **parents to control lice outbreaks in our school and protect our children. It should not be embarrassing to get head lice! Anyone can get it. With this in mind, please be upfront with our school nurse Mrs. Gilbert and notify her about each and every case of head lice discovered. She will check your child before they reenter their classroom (as our school does have a nit free policy), and will notify other parents in that classroom. In this way we can empower other families and allow them to keep a vigilant outlook for any further outbreaks.**

As Ms. Hartigan mentioned, it is really up to us as parents to be vigilant with our children to eliminate lice in our school community and stop the spread of head lice. Working together we can stop the spread of head lice. Thank you for your time and effort in this matter!