

*Head lice (*Pediculus capitis*) live on the human scalp and feed exclusively on human blood, which can result in itching, irritability and sores on the head. They are spread primarily through head-to-head contact. Integrated pest management (IPM) is a smart and sensible approach to managing pests.*

### Integrated Pest Management

IPM is a decision-making process based on prevention, accurate pest identification, evidence-based interventions, record-keeping and evaluation to manage pests effectively while safeguarding human and environmental health. Although head lice do not transmit disease, they can affect student health and school performance because of discomfort and sleep disturbance. Schools can and should adopt IPM policies and management protocols that focus on education and communication.

### Managing Head Lice at School

Head lice are almost exclusively spread through direct, head-to-head contact. Indirect spread through contact with personal belongings (combs, brushes, hats) is much less likely to occur.<sup>1</sup> Head lice are very unlikely to be spread through contact with furniture, rugs or other surfaces previously occupied by an infested person.

- The major focus of control activities should be to reduce the number of lice on the head and to lessen the risks of head-to-head contact.<sup>1</sup>
- Sprays or foggers are not necessary to control head lice and can be toxic if inhaled or absorbed through the skin.<sup>2</sup> They should not be used.
- School personnel involved in detection of head lice infestations should be appropriately trained, with emphasis on the importance of correct diagnosis.
- Teachers may be the first to notice evidence of head lice but should refer the student to the school nurse or other trained staff member to confirm the diagnosis.
- The American Association of Pediatrics<sup>3</sup> and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention<sup>2</sup> recommend against mass screening of students.

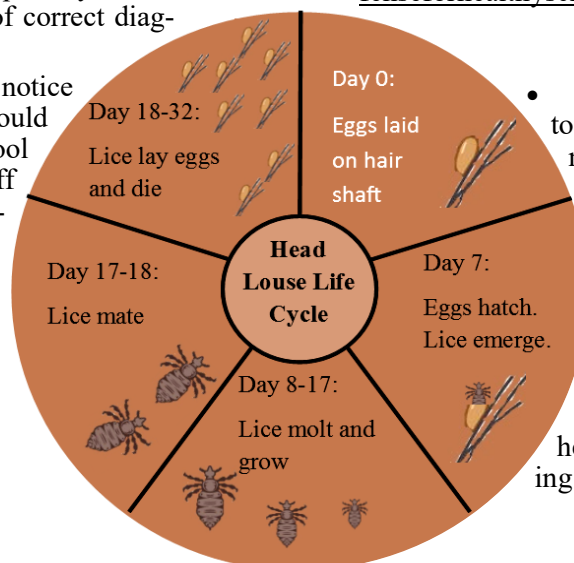
### The School Nurse's Role

School nurses play a critical role in diagnosing and educating about head lice. Nurses also play an important leadership role in advocating for effective evidence-based policies and protocols for prevention and management of head lice in schools and at home. School nurses should:

- Advocate for evidence-based policies. There is no benefit to excluding infested students from school.
- At the beginning of the school year, or during a head lice 'outbreak', inform parents of school head lice policies and provide information on effective strategies for prevention and control of head lice.
- After diagnosis, allow the student to return to class and remain in school and notify the child's parents at the end of school day.
- Screen known contacts in the school, utilizing discretion and maintaining confidentiality.
- Not report cases to youth/social services.
- Not bag clothing.
- Keep records of each diagnosis, noting student's name, classroom, date reported and action taken by school staff. Records can help to continuously improve policies and protocols.
- Review additional free training resources at [pestdefenseforhealthyschools.com](http://pestdefenseforhealthyschools.com)<sup>4</sup>

### Educate Parents

- Advise parents to use a fine-toothed comb to remove lice and nits. Applying hair conditioner first can make it easier. Over-the-counter lice-killing shampoos, used according to directions, may be helpful but combing may still be needed, especially if lice are resistant to the active ingredients in the shampoos.
- Educate students to avoid head-to-head contact and avoid sharing hats and combs.



## References

<sup>1</sup>Devore, C.D. and G.E. Shutze, 2018. Head Lice. Pediatrics 135 (5) e1355: <http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/pediatrics/135/5/e1355.full.pdf>

<sup>2</sup>U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC): <http://www.cdc.gov/parasites/lice/head/index.html>

<sup>3</sup>American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP): <http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/135/5/e1355.full.pdf>

<sup>4</sup>The Pest Defense for Healthy Schools: <http://pestdefenseforhealthyschools.com>

## Other Resources

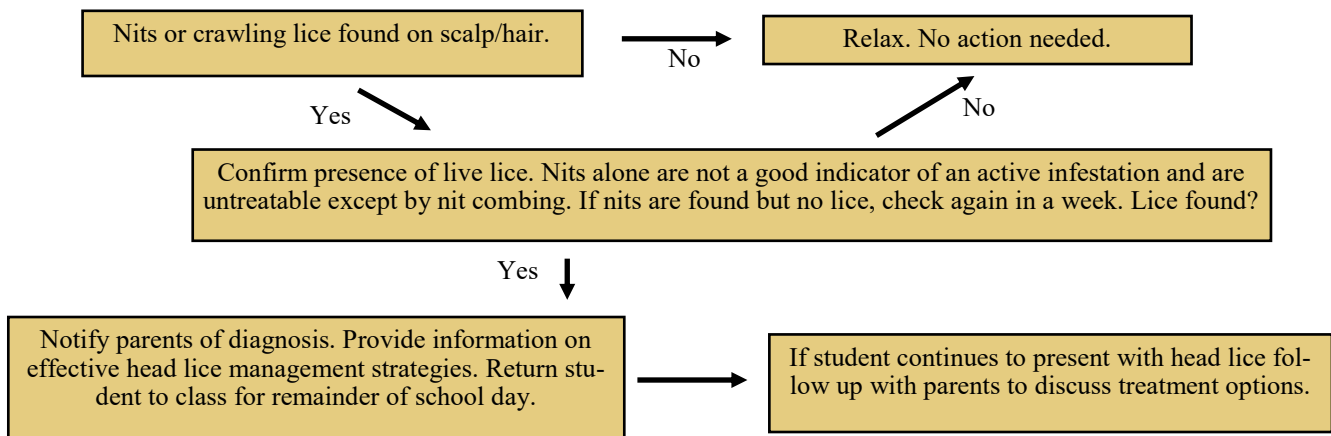
Harvard School of Public Health: <https://www.health.harvard.edu/diseases-and-conditions/head-lice>

National Association of School Nurses (NASN): <https://www.nasn.org/PolicyAdvocacy/PositionPapersandReports/NASNPositionStatementsFullView/tabid/462/ArticleId/40/Pediculosis-Management-in-the-School-Setting-Revised-2011>

## Use Integrated Pest Management

- Prepare: Develop and implement an action plan including protocols for communication, intervention, record-keeping and training.
- Identify: Ensure nursing or other designated staff can accurately diagnose active head lice infestations.
- Maintain records. Keep a log of sightings, dates and actions taken.
- Do NOT apply pesticides to classrooms and buses for head lice.

# School Response Action Chart



# Treatment Options for Head Lice

Option 1. Apply FDA-approved lice-control product following label instructions. *(note: many products require two applications 10 days apart. In addition, some products are only effective if followed by nit-combing). Caution: Do not over-apply.*

Option 2 (If hair can be nit-combed). Thorough, repeated nit-combing may be effective as a stand-alone treatment. Nit-combing may also enhance effectiveness if done after treatment with a lice-control product. Apply conditioner to hair. Nit-comb thoroughly. Repeat until no live lice are found for a two-week interval.

Periodically recheck. Any live lice found?

Yes

Following label instructions, repeat treatment (after interval allowed on product label) and/or repeat nit-combing or consult physician about prescription lice-control products available.