

## **An important message from your school health office**

Every year cases of head lice are found in our community. Anytime children come together, particularly at the start of a school year, the cases of identified head lice rises. In an effort to assist parents and guardians increase their awareness regarding head lice prevention, detection, and treatment, we encourage you to reference the Health Services portion of the D303 Website for information regarding the control and management of head lice in our schools.

Anyone can get head lice. Head lice is primarily transmitted through direct head-to-head contact. Lice can also be transmitted from sharing hats, brushes, and other personal items. Transmission in the school setting is rare according to the CDC. More commonly, children get head lice from siblings, playmates, and from sharing pillows at pajama parties. Although transmission in schools is rare, identification is often made in the school setting. It is important for parents to know that head lice are a problem in many communities and do not reflect poor hygiene or social status. Most importantly, parents are integral in the prevention and detection of head lice in their children. To prevent the spread of this communicable condition, please check your child (ren) regularly for evidence of lice. If you should discover a case of head lice, please notify your child's health office as well as their outside activity directors. You may also consider alerting the parents of your child's recent playmates, as this is the best way to protect the community from an outbreak.

The district approach to lice management in the school settings is outlined for you on the website previously mentioned. This approach is based on scientific and medical evidence that supports the education process. With regard to preventative treatment, parents are encouraged to seek guidance from their health care provider prior to using any treatment options. Since mass school screenings do not reduce the incidence of head lice in our settings, such screenings are not conducted in our schools. Research clearly indicates that a "no lice" "no nit" policy for schools hinders academic attendance and performance, while doing little to change the incidence of lice in a school setting. It is important to keep in mind that the life cycle of a louse is 3 to 4 weeks, therefore, by the time live lice are identified in a student, they have had an infestation for many days and they have been in a variety of settings in the community during this timeframe. If a cluster of cases is identified in one classroom, the health office will send a letter home to parents to notify them of these findings.

Like so many health matters, prevention is key. Teach your child to avoid head to head contact with friends and to avoid the sharing of personal items such as hairbrushes and hats. Those messages are reinforced in school as well. The nurses in the health office maintain strict confidentiality on all student concerns, and therefore, we are not at liberty to share personal student information on this matter. We thank you in advance for partnering with us to prevent the spread of lice among children.

Health Services