

BCPS Policy on Head Lice

Pediculosis (head lice) is a common occurrence in children, particularly during the elementary school years. When children have head lice, they experience itching of the scalp and the presence of live lice in the hair or viable ova (nits) attached to the hair shafts.

Head lice require a human host in order to survive more than a few hours. Head lice are most often transmitted within the family or through close head-to-head contact with infested persons (e.g. sleepovers). Although less common, it also may be transmitted by contact with infested person's personal articles (combs, hair ornaments, hats, helmets, and clothing). Bed linens, pillows, stuffed animals, carpeting, and upholstery that come in contact with the head may also serve as a means of transmission.

BCPS policy and procedures are aligned with recommendations from the *American Academy of Pediatrics*, *Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene*, and the *National Association of School Nurses*. Students who have **live lice must be excluded** from school until they are treated and are free of live lice. Generally, **students may remain in school with nits as long as there are no live lice and the nits are not increasing in number**. Students found to have lice are required to show proof of treatment in order to return to school. After interviewing the parent/guardian, teacher, and student, targeted screening will be done to those students with the likelihood of close contact with the affected student. Parents/Guardians of students found with live head lice will be notified that the student is to be excluded from school and referred for treatment. Education to parents/guardians of affected students regarding treatment, including application of pediculocide, removal of nits, environmental controls, and screening of family members, as well as protocols to return to school will be discussed. Students are then monitored for two weeks for decreasing nits. If live lice are found then the student will be excluded again.

The position statement from the *National Association of School Nurses* states that the presence of nits does not indicate active infestation and no evidence is found that presence of nits correlates with any disease process (Scott, Gilmer, Johannessen, 2004). Other studies show that lice are not highly transferable in the school setting (Hootman, 2002) and no outbreaks of lice resulted when allowing children with nits to remain in class (Scott, Gliner, & Johannessen, 2004).

Evidence based research indicates that school wide screening and notification is not necessary. The focus is on education of affected students and families. Therefore, only affected students and their families will be notified by the school.

It is the position of the *National Association of School Nurses* and BCPS that the management of pediculosis should not disrupt the education process. Children found with live head lice should be excluded and referred to parents for treatment. Data does not support school exclusion for nits. Because, no disease process is associated with head lice, schools are not advised to exclude students when nits remain after appropriate lice treatment, although further monitoring for signs of re-infestation is appropriate (as done in BCPS policy).

If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact Ms. Flanagan, 410 887 1533.