

Denton ISD

Head Lice Information Sheet

Lice are fairly common wherever groups of people get together, including the school setting. Many people have concerns about the spread of disease with head lice, but these insects do not spread disease. They do, however, live by biting the scalp and eating the blood that comes from that bite. That can cause some itching, and sometimes sores if the scratching gets really bad. Those sores caused by the scratching can become infected, which causes a bigger health problem than the head lice themselves. Having head lice is not a matter of being dirty or having poor hygiene. Lice simply look for the opportunity to get to anyone's head that they can crawl to. Lice cannot fly or jump...they crawl, and they prefer to stay on people's heads where they get food.

Your child's school nurse is a great resource for answering questions about head lice. Because it is a fairly common condition in any public place where large numbers of people gather, school nurses have a lot of experience in dealing with head lice, and can make the best decision about when students should be sent home and when they can stay in class. Remember, school is not the only place where people get head lice! Even if we checked every child's head every day, there would still be students with head lice. That is why as a general rule, "widespread classroom checks" are no longer routinely done - even if we checked every child in a classroom where there was one case, another child in that class could still come in the next day with lice, so classroom checks become ineffective and disrupt classroom instructional time. Classroom checks also make it more difficult to protect children's privacy, so if we are checking a number of children, we usually do it more quietly one child at a time in the nurse's office. Prevention is more effectively accomplished by educating parents about checking their own children and what to do in the event head lice are seen, and to educate teachers and students about symptoms that should be referred and checked. You may see more about the nurse's standard of practice at

<http://www.dentonisd.org/5123871315272/blank/browse.asp?a=383&bmdrn=2000&bcob=0&c=73728>

or by going to the DISD website, opening up the Health Services webpage, and then clicking on the file "Those darn head lice."

The standards we use are recommended by the American Academy of Pediatrics, the Texas Department of State Health Services (TDSHS), and the Harvard School of Public Health to name a few. Those organizations **do not** recommend widespread checks for head lice in classrooms, but rather that students be checked if they are having symptoms and sent home if there is evidence of "active pediculosis." Following that recommendation means that we require children who have evidence of **live** head lice go home until treatment has begun and progress to get rid of the lice is evident. Nits (lice eggs) that are closer than one-fourth inch to the scalp and seeing live bugs are the symptoms of live lice. Nits farther away from the scalp still need to be removed, but are usually indicative of an earlier case of head lice; they are not usually going to be able to hatch. Progress is determined by fewer and fewer nits being present in the child's head. Head checks by the nurse are required prior to readmission to class.

You can see some good pictures (and read up on the most current practices and standards of care) by going to the TDSHS website at <http://www.dshs.state.tx.us/schoolhealth/lice.shtml>

