

# SAINT MARY SCHOOL

## *Office of the School Nurse*

### LICE

**Lice** is a treatable condition that is generally not associated with any serious medical complications. This letter will acquaint you with the nature of this infestation and what should be done to get rid of it.

**HOW YOU GET IT:** Head lice are usually transmitted through close personal contact with another infested individual or through use of shared combs, brushes, and other grooming aids. They may also be transmitted through sharing of hats, caps, wigs, coats, or through comingling of these items at the homes of friends, at school, at church or other public places. Most parents have the impression that lice become established on persons who are unclean. In the case of head lice, this is **NOT** true. Frequent bathing will neither prevent head lice nor eliminate an infestation once it has become established.

**WHAT TO LOOK FOR:** Head lice are elongated insects about this (--) long and are grayish-white with dark margins. Lice do not have wings and, therefore, **CANNOT** fly. They **DO NOT** jump, but move very quickly; this makes them difficult to find in a child's hair.

Since crawling forms are so difficult to see, the diagnosis of head lice infestation is frequently made on the basis of finding nits. A nit is a louse egg. Nits are teardrop in shape, about this size (\*), and vary in color from yellowish-brown to white. Head lice attach each nit to a hair shaft with a waterproof, cement-like substance. Thus, nits cannot be washed out or brushed out of the hair like dandruff or other debris that sometimes look like nits to the naked eye. Clusters of nits may be found in any section of hair, but in mild infestations a careful examination of the entire scalp may be necessary to detect them.

**TREATMENT:** Treatment is directed at the infested individual and his or her personal articles, e.g., caps, combs, brushes, towels and bedding.

#### A. INDIVIDUAL TREATMENT

1. Remove all your child's clothing and place him/ her in a bath or shower stall and the clothing in a plastic bag.
2. Apply head louse treatment according to your physician's instructions or label instructions provided by the drug manufacturer. There are medicated shampoos and hair rinses (pediculicides) available for head lice. Lindane is available by prescription only and pyrethrin solutions may be purchased without prescription from the pharmacy. There is no published evidence to indicate that one product is superior to the others. You will need to remove **ALL** the nits (egg cases) either by combing with the special comb provided in the treatment or by hand.
3. Have your child put on clean clothing after treatment.
4. Repeat the treatment in 7 to 10 days. While the pediculicides mentioned above rapidly kill crawling lice, they **MAY NOT** kill all the nits. Therefore, the treatment should be repeated in 7-10 days to kill newly hatched lice. The 7-10 day interval corresponds to the incubation period of a louse's egg.
5. All family members and close friends of your child should be examined  
Family members who have evidence of infestation (crawling forms or nits)

should be treated. Siblings or a parent who shares a bed with a known infested child should be treated, whether or not there is evidence of infestation at the time of examination.

6. Daily examination of the head to remove all the nits is essential. Blow drying hair after normal shampooing is also helpful.

#### **B. DECONTAMINATION OF PERSONAL ARTICLES AND ENVIRONMENT:**

Since heat is lethal to lice and their eggs, many personal articles can be disinfected by machine washing in **HOT** water and /or drying using the **HOT** cycle of the dryer. Eggs are killed in 5 minutes at 51.5 C (125 F), and crawling forms succumb to slightly lower temperatures. Home hot water heaters keep water at about 60 C when the heat selector is set on medium or high. However, some water heaters are not able to sustain the 60 C water temperature when several loads of laundry are processed one after the other or when other demands for hot water (bathing) are made simultaneously. To maintain the water at 60 C or higher, allow time between loads of laundry or baths for the water heater to regain its maximum water temperature. If total reliance is placed to the clothes dryer for disinfecting, dry articles for at least 20 minutes at the **HIGH** heat setting. Some non-washables articles may be disinfected in the dryer provided that the heat will not harm them. Bagging articles that cannot be disinfected in the dryer in securely fastened plastic bags for 2 weeks will also kill any louse or nits.

1. Machine wash all washable clothing and bed linens that have been in contact with your child within the previous 3 days.
2. Personal articles of clothing or bedding that cannot be washed or dried may be dry cleaned or simply left in a plastic bag and sealed for a period of 14 days.
3. Combs, brushes and similar items can be disinfected by soaking them in one of the pediculicide liquids for 1 hour or by soaking them in a pan of water heated on the stove to about 150 F for 5-10 minutes (caution: heat may damage some combs and brushes).

**NOTIFICATION OF OTHER PARENTS:** Parents of your child's closest friend(s) should be notified that their child may also be infested since the children play together. This is particularly important if the children have slept together or participated in activities involving frequent body contact such as wrestling, ballet classes, football, etc. After school child care facilities should also be notified should your child participate in them.

**RETURNING TO SCHOOL:** Your child may return to school the morning after he or she has been treated with a head louse treatment and all the nits are removed. Please have your child stop by the nurses office before going to the classroom.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at 203-438-7288, ext 253. Thank you for your assistance in this matter.

Carolyn Canavan RN