



Head Lice Fast Facts for Parents of K – 12 Students



What are head lice?

Lice are small parasitic insects that live on the scalp and neck hairs of a human host. Lice CANNOT hop or fly, and therefore head-to-head contact with an infected person is the most probable form of transmission. However, transmission from hats, combs, pillows, etc is possible—but much less likely.

How are head lice transmitted?

Nits (louse eggs) cannot be passed, ONLY living lice can transfer from one person to another. Due to pesticides found in lice treatments, it is only recommended that persons with LIVE lice or viable eggs be treated.

According to the CDC, most transmissions occur in the home environment (playdates, sleepovers, etc).

Who gets lice?

Anyone can get lice, but cases of lice and lice exposures are more commonly found in children of preschool and early elementary age.

Caucasians, more frequently than other ethnic groups, tend to have lice due to their hair type and haircare regimens.

How is head lice treated?

Check with your child's doctor before beginning any head lice treatment. The most effective way to treat head lice is with head lice medicine. After each treatment, using the comb-out method every 2 to 3 days for 2 to 3 weeks may help remove the nits and eggs.

Head lice medicine should be used only when it is certain that your child has living head lice. Remember, check with your child's doctor before starting any head lice medicine. Also, when head lice medicines are used, it is important to use them safely as directed. Here are some safety guidelines for lice treatments:

- Follow the directions on the package exactly as written.
- Never let children apply the medicine. Medicine should be applied by an adult.
- Always rinse the medicine off over a sink and not during a shower or bath, so the medicine doesn't run off the head onto other areas of skin. Place your child's head over a sink and rinse the medicine off with warm water (not hot water).
- Never place a plastic bag on a child's head.
- Do not leave a child alone with medicine in his or her hair.
- Store medicine in a locked cabinet, out of sight and reach of children.

Check with your child's doctor before beginning a second or third medicine. Your child may just need to repeat the same medication, or switch to a new one.

Ask your child's doctor if you have any questions or if treatments you have tried have not gotten rid of lice.

There is NO conclusive evidence that alternative treatments are effective, i.e. Petroleum jelly, margarine, mayonnaise, herbal oils, olive oil, and enzyme-based products.

Warning about dangerous home remedies for lice

Never use dangerous products like gasoline or kerosene or medicines made for use on animals!

Do children with head lice need to be excluded from school?

Exclusion policies for students and staff with head lice are typically determined at the district level (for public schools) or the school level (for private schools). Check with your school or school district for their specific exclusion policy.

St. Louis County Department of Public Health (DPH), in line with the CDC and the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends the following with regards to lice/nits:

- Children diagnosed with live head lice do not need to be sent home early from school; they can go home at the end of the day, be treated, and return to class after appropriate treatment has begun. Nits may persist after treatment, but successful treatment should kill crawling lice.
- Head lice can be a nuisance, but they have not been shown to spread disease, therefore exclusion is not recommended.

Is head lice reportable to the local or state health departments?

No; St. Louis County and the Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services, do not require head lice to be reported in a K – 12 school setting. (Note: Daycare and early childhood settings have different rules and reporting policies for head lice.)

Because an infestation of head lice is not a reportable condition in Missouri, the only way to know someone has lice is if the individual or parent/guardian notifies the school. It is the responsibility of a case's parent/guardian to notify their school's nurse of a lice diagnosis so the school may put in place any preventive transmission measures.

However, it may be beneficial for the sake of others to share information with school nurses, parents of classmates, and others about contact with head lice, a responsibility that falls to parent/guardian of school-age child who has been diagnosed with lice.

I don't like my school's lice policy; can CDC or DPH do something?

CDC is not a regulatory agency. School head lice policies are typically determined by local school boards or school districts. In St. Louis County, head lice does not fall under the purview of DPH because it is not considered a public health threat. However, DPH is available to schools in the event they have any questions regarding head lice.

I know there is a lice outbreak at my child's school, why hasn't a notification gone out to parents?

In the daycare and early childhood setting, the threshold for notifying parents of ECC-age children is one active case. However, K – 12 schools are not required to notify families of active cases of lice as lice do not spread disease and are not considered a public health concern. Many schools and school districts do notify families when there are cases of lice in a school or classroom for awareness and so that parents can monitor their children. As noted above, guidelines for how an infestation of lice is handled in a K – 12 setting is typically determined by school districts or school boards. Check with your school or school district to learn more about what their notification policies are for head lice.

How should schools control head lice?

Parents should check their children regularly for lice at home. Wide-spread head lice screening efforts by schools have not been shown to be effective.

If you are notified that your child has head lice, you should treat an active infestation both for your child's comfort and to prevent transmission to others.

Head lice medicine should be used only when it is certain that your child has living head lice. Remember, check with your child's doctor before starting any head lice medicine. Also, when head lice medicines are used, it is important to use them safely as directed.

Children with head lice can go to school.

