

MONTGOMERY COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES  
PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICES  
SCHOOL HEALTH SERVICES

Dear Parent/Guardian

The following is pertinent information about a condition found commonly in preschool and elementary-age children. Head lice, also called *Pediculus humanus capitis*, are parasitic insects found on the heads of people. Anyone who comes in close contact (especially head-to-head contact) with someone who has head lice is at greatest risk. Occasionally, head lice may be acquired from contact with clothing or personal items that belong to an infested person. Personal hygiene or cleanliness in the home or school has nothing to do with getting head lice. Here are some ways you can identify and/or prevent head lice.

**BE ALERT FOR THE SIGNS OF HEAD LICE:** Signs and symptoms of head lice infestation include a tickling feeling of something moving in the hair, itching and/or sores caused by scratching on the back of the neck and head. If you observe your child scratching in this area, check his/her head for lice and nits attached to the hair shafts. The adult louse is about the size of a sesame seed, has six legs, no wings, and is tan to grayish white. Lice eggs are called nits. Nits are very small, about the size of a knot in thread, teardrop shaped, hard to see and often confused for dandruff or hair spray droplets. The female louse attaches the nits to the hair shaft, close to the scalp with a glue-like substance that makes the nits difficult to remove. Ordinary combing, brushing or shampooing will not remove them.

**INSPECT:** Examine the hair and scalp of all family members regularly throughout the year. This means all adults and children living in the same house. Pets do not carry human lice. Close inspection of the hair and scalp will sometimes reveal the adult lice, but you are more likely to see the nits.

**TREAT:** If lice or nits within ¼ inch of the scalp are found, or your child requires treatment for a lice infestation before returning to school, use a special over-the-counter medication, called a pediculicide, or a medication prescribed by your health care provider. Use the medicated treatment exactly according to directions. After the treatment and the hair is dry, the nits close to the scalp should be removed with a special nit comb. Check the hair every 2 - 3 days for 2 - 3 weeks until you are sure all lice and nits within ¼ inch of the scalp are gone.

**CLEAN THE ENVIRONMENT:** Check other household members for lice and/or nits and treat if necessary. Wash all washable clothing and bed linens worn or used by the infested person during the 2 days before treatment. Use hot water and dry laundry using high heat for at least 20 minutes. Clothing and other items that are not washable (coats, hats, scarves, stuffed animals) may be dry cleaned or stored in sealed plastic bags for two weeks. Soak combs and brushes for 1 hour in rubbing alcohol, Lysol or wash with soap and hot water. Vacuum the floor and furniture. Do not use fumigant sprays; they can be toxic if inhaled or absorbed through the skin.

**PREVENT A REINFESTATION:**

Avoid head-to-head contact which is common during play at school and at home (sports activities, on the playground, slumber parties, at camp). Do not share clothing, such as hats, scarves, coats, sports uniforms, or hair ribbons/clips. Do not share combs, brushes, or towels. Do not lie on beds, couches, pillows, carpets, or stuffed animals that have recently been in contact with an infested person. *You are encouraged to notify the health room if you have found a head lice infestation on your child so that prevention measures can be implemented at school. This information will be kept confidential.*

Please contact your child's School Community Health Nurse if you have any questions and/or look for additional information at

<http://www.cdc.gov/parasites/lice/head/index.html>

[http://www.cdc.gov/parasites/lice/head/gen\\_info/faqs.html](http://www.cdc.gov/parasites/lice/head/gen_info/faqs.html)

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