

## **The Law as it Relates to Head Lice**

According to Texas Law a child must be sent home from school if live lice are found in their hair. They will be allowed to return to school after one medicated treatment has been given or they bring a note from a physician saying they have been cleared to return to school. When the child returns to school, a head check is not required by law and there is no requirement to report cases of head lice to officials.

### **“No-Nit” Policies**

A “no nit” policy is one that excludes students from school based on the presence of lice eggs whether or not live lice are present. The Department of State Health Services (DSHS) does not recommend a “no nit” policy. We do recognize, however, that school districts may adopt one as a local option.

### **MATERIALS:**

The following Fact Sheets provided in English and Spanish are copyright free and can be downloaded and printed off in black and white or color to be handed out to parents, caregivers and school staff to help educate and inform.

#### **Lice Fact Sheets - English**

- What Are Lice? (Publication # E05-12864) ([Color](#) | [B&W](#)) (PDF)
- How Do I Know if My Child Has Lice and How Did They Get It? (Publication # E05-12865) ([Color](#) | [B&W](#)) (PDF)
- What Should I Do If My Child Has Lice? (Publication # E05-12866) ([Color](#) | [B&W](#)) (PDF)
- How Do I Keep Lice From Coming Back? (Publication # E05-12867) ([Color](#) | [B&W](#)) (PDF)
- Misconceptions and Truths about Lice Treatment (Publication # E05-12868) ([Color](#) | [B&W](#)) (PDF)
- Lice Resources (Publication # E05-12869) ([Color](#) | [B&W](#)) (PDF)

## **GUIDELINES:**

### **What are Head Lice?**

- Head lice are tiny grey to brown insects about the size of a sesame seed that live in human hair and must feed on human blood to live.

- They lay tiny white oval-shaped eggs about the size of a knot in a thread, called nits that lice glue to each strand of hair close to the scalp. Although it is hard to see head lice, a person can see the nits if they look closely.
- Nits are most often found in the hair behind the ears and at the back of the head and neck. The first sign of lice is itching of the head which is caused by the bite of the head lice.

### **How do You Get Head Lice?**

- Head lice happen mostly with elementary school-aged children.
- Children get lice from other children through head to head contact during play or sports or nap time and most often in school settings.
- Sometimes sharing combs, hats or school lockers with a louse infested child can spread head lice.
- You can't spread nits...only live lice.
- Head lice do not spread disease.
- Any child can get head lice. It doesn't matter where they live or go to school; boy or girl, black, white or brown. It doesn't mean the child is sick or unclean. It certainly doesn't mean they have bad parents.
- Children get head lice almost as much as the common cold. Millions get it at least once a year.

### **How Do You Get Rid of Head Lice?**

The Texas Department of State Health Services recommends the following treatment for head lice and nits:

1. Use an over-the-counter FDA-approved shampoo treatment that you find at the drug or grocery store. Follow the directions on the packaging exactly.
2. Remove as many nits as possible with a special nit comb that comes with the head lice treatment.
3. Treat your home at the same time you treat your child. Do the following:
  - Soak combs and brushes in some of the lice shampoo for 1 hour; or, in very, very hot water for 5-10 minutes.
  - Wash sheets, blankets and other bedding in the hottest setting of water in the washing machine.
  - Dry-clean non-washable items; or, seal these items in a plastic bag for 1 week.
  - Vacuum furniture, carpets and mattresses thoroughly.
4. Treat hair for a second time after 7 days (or follow the manufacturer of the lice treatment's instructions) to make sure that you kill any lice that may have hatched from nits that might have been missed during the combing, before they lay eggs.

5. There is no need to cut hair. Lice like to crawl on short hair just as much as long hair and they need the same amount of treatment.

### **How Do You Keep Lice From Coming Back?**

- Teach family members to recognize nits and how lice is spread and check everyone's hair periodically.
- If you find lice, follow the recommended treatment closely. It should be reported to the school nurse, who can check close contacts.
- Remind children not to share combs, brushes, hair accessories, headphones, hats, clothing, bedding, coats and so forth.
- Ask the teacher at your child's school if there is a space to keep jackets, hats and other personal items separate for each child. Ask what you can do to help.

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## DEPARTMENT OF STATE HEALTH SERVICES RECOMMENDATIONS ON “NO-NIT” POLICIES IN SCHOOLS

At least 9 million children contracted head lice last year in the U.S. alone. Not surprisingly, the Department of State Health Services (DSHS) School Health Program received numerous calls from concerned parents and school staff understandably frustrated with continual incidences of head lice among students. Often the issue of “no-nit” policies is discussed. While DSHS does not recommend a “no-nit” policy, DSHS does recognize that school districts may adopt one as a local option. DSHS does not have legal authority to impose a set policy regarding head lice on school districts. DSHS does, however, urge school districts that opt for a strict “no-nit” policy to ensure that the policy does not cause children to miss class unnecessarily, or encourage the embarrassment and social alienation of those students who suffer from chronic head lice infestations.

Why doesn't DSHS advocate a “no-nit” policy? Pediculosis has been around since prehistoric ages and represents more of a social issue than a health threat. The “no-nit” policy places a disproportionate amount of emphasis on pediculosis management rather than on other more legitimate health concerns which should be of a higher priority. This over emphasis can lead to unproductive use of time by school staff and parents, missed classes, unnecessary absences, and parents missing work.

DSHS is not alone in their stance against strict “no-nit” policies. A panel of scientists and public health professionals convened at the Harvard School of Public Health to discuss issues related to increased evidence of head lice resistance to certain pediculicides. The panel published a consensus report with suggestions for treatment and prevention of head lice based on their findings. In regards to “no-nit” policies, the report states that “there is little evidence that exclusion from school reduces transmission of lice. No other minor medical condition warrants school exclusion. Conversely, children with more morbid, communicable disorders (i.e. viral URI's, tinea capitis) are routinely allowed to remain in class. Therefore, confirmation of a louse infestation does not warrant exclusion, but does require treatment. The “no-nit” policy is not in the best interest of the child, the family or the school.”

DSHS recommends school districts establish a consistent policy/protocol for addressing the incidence of head lice among students. Policy and protocol should be developed with active input and support from parents, local health care professionals, school staff, chief administrators and school nurses. Underlying DSHS's recommendations is the hope that school staff and parents will work together as a team to address the inevitable incidence of head lice among students. As with any persistent disease, education, empathy and patience are crucial elements of any effective and lasting treatment plan.

For more information on prevention and treatment of head lice, go to:

[www.dshs.state.tx.us/schoolhealth/lice.shtm](http://www.dshs.state.tx.us/schoolhealth/lice.shtm)