

December 2011

To All Parents/Guardian:

Let's face it, head lice is not a welcomed topic. Recently, several people have expressed concern about the fact that Medway does not follow a strict "no nit" protocol. It is important for families to understand the facts and reasoning behind this decision.

Lice is a common childhood condition that affects many families during the school-age years. Lice do not transmit disease, and their presence is not a sign of poor hygiene. Several studies have proven that keeping children with eggs (nits) out of school does not reduce the number of infections or even the severity of infestations. It just keeps children out of school, and possibly drives the problem underground thereby potentially worsening the situation. One very good article on discouraging a no nit policy appeared in TIME magazine, and you can link to it here < [School Head-Lice Policies Must Be Relaxed](#) >.

Lice are insects about the size of a sesame seed. They do not jump or fly. Symptoms are itching, red bite marks on the scalp, and occasionally swollen head or neck glands. Lice can infest anyone; however they are most common in 5-12 year olds because their play habits often lead to head-to-head contact. It is important for children to be taught not to share hats, helmets, scarves, or hair-care items. They should be encouraged to wear long hair tied back, and avoid play involving another person's hair. It is, however, unrealistic to expect that all types of contact that may result in the spread of lice can be eliminated. As a community, we need to be prudent. Key components in this effort are **surveillance, communication, and proper management**. The responsibility for carrying out this effort must be shared between home and school. Everyone plays a role. Specifically:

**Surveillance:**

- Parents/guardians should check their children's head/hair consistently throughout the school year and summer months not just when you get notification of an outbreak.
- In elementary grades, the school nurses do monitor classrooms and perform head-checks in rooms wherein an outbreak has been identified. Please note, however, this cuts heavily into both teaching and nursing time.
- In the middle and high schools, nurses check heads only at the request of parents.

**Communication:**

- If you suspect a case of head lice, please consult your health care provider for appropriate treatment direction and alert the school nurse. If identified early and properly treated, children should not miss school because of head lice.

- If the school confirms a case of head lice in the elementary grades (K-6), a notice will be sent home to all parents/guardians in that classroom.

**Management:**

- Head-lice management is a very time-consuming process that involves treating the head as directed followed by careful combing of the hair and manual removing of nits daily. Environmental cleaning of the home, clothing, linens, toys and hair items is also necessary. Done promptly and thoroughly, it should not have to be repeated.
- There are several web sites with information on head lice management. As with all internet information, however, you need to make sure that the information you are receiving is sound and effective. As previously stated, please contact and rely on your health care provider for directions on treatment.
- After treatment, children do need to be evaluated by the school nurse before they can return to the classroom. Please accompany your child to the school's Health Office on these occasions.

Hopefully, this information is useful. It is important to deal with facts when discussing this subject and realize that the schools are here primarily to educate the children. It is our goal, therefore, to keep the students in class. Schools and parents need to work together in attaining these goals. There is no way to eliminate head lice and the schools are only one of the many places that children will be exposed to them. Unlike most places, in the school setting we are aware, sensitive and vigilant. Our best hope is to keep the subject out in the open and to be aware and stay on top of the problem when it arises.

Thank you and my best wishes to everyone for a wonderful holiday season and Happy New Year.

Sincerely,

Penny McKay, RN, BSN, MSN  
School Nurse Coordinator  
Medway Public Schools