

## **LICE FACT SHEET (PEDICULOSIS)**

### **What is lice?**

Lice are tiny insects that live on the scalp and hair. They hatch from small grayish eggs, called nits that are about the size of a sesame seed. The nits attach firmly to base of hair often behind the ears and neck. The lice crawl over and bite the scalp, causing itching.

### **How is it spread?**

Lice are spread by close contact between people. The lice and nits can also be shed onto combs, brushes, hats, clothes, stuffed animals, towels, pillows, bedding, furniture and carpets. They can spread by sharing these items.

### **When is it contagious?**

Lice are contagious as long as the insects or nits are alive. Nits usually hatch in 7 – 10 days, and the louse can live for 20-30 days. When lice and nits are off the body (e.g. on clothes, etc.), they do not survive for more than 7 days.

### **How is it diagnosed and treated?**

Lice are diagnosed by identifying nits or lice in the scalp and hair. Lice are treated by applying a special shampoo (e.g., Nix, Rid). Consult your health care provider for the appropriate treatment since the medication can be dangerous for infants and women who are pregnant or nursing. Afterward, the nits must all be removed carefully with a fine-tooth comb or by hand. Rinsing the hair in vinegar solution (half vinegar, half water) can help loosen the nits. Sometimes a second treatment is needed two weeks later to kill the nits that may have survived and hatched into lice.

### **Should the child stay home?**

A child with lice should be sent home from school and may return the day after treatment is completed and he/she is free of nits.

### **How can we limit the spread?**

- Check all family members for lice and nits, and treat if necessary.
- Wash combs and brushes in boiling water for 10 minutes.
- Do not share personal items.
- Wash all washable clothing, bedding, stuffed animals and small carpets in hot water and dry in a hot dryer.
- Non-washable items should be dry cleaned or stored in a plastic bag for 10-14 days.
- Vacuum all carpets and upholstered furniture.
- Keep coats at school in separate plastic bags.
- Continue to recheck head until sure no more nits have appeared.

**Readmission to school:**

The student is readmitted to school after effective treatment as evidenced by the following:

1. Taken to school by parents following exclusion.
2. Screened by the school nurse before entrance into classroom.
3. The absence of nits and lice dead or alive.
4. Parents are to remain in school until the nurse informs them that their child is cleared for readmission.