

Head Lice and School Staff

Can I get head lice from a student?

Head lice have legs that pinch the hair shaft as they crawl. They do not fall off readily and those that may fall off are usually at the end of their life span. Lice do not jump, fly or hop. They are a parasite and must feed off a human head to live. They are spread from prolonged head to head contact. It is unlikely to get head lice from a student because staff do not usually have head to head contact with students. Giving a quick hug to a student is still ok.

Head lice is a nuisance but not a health issue. You are much more likely to acquire a cold/virus from your student than you are head lice!

Can other students get head lice because a student in the class has head lice?

Just like staff are unlikely to get head lice from a student, other students in the class are unlikely as well. Children can have head to head contact in many settings, including school, home, play or after school activities, but sustained or frequent head to head contact generally occurs between family members or at sleepovers. Remember students model your behavior. If you present in a calm manner and model steps of prevention, students will follow.

What should I do if a parent tells me their child has head lice or I suspect a student has head lice?

Let the school nurse or secretary know. The student can be checked by whomever is trained in your school. People who have head lice may have had it for weeks prior to diagnosis so there is no need for panic. Definite diagnosis is needed before class parent notification. Please maintain student confidentiality. It is the parent's responsibility to tell other parents. If the parent tells you of other students or a sleepover where they might have acquired the lice, notify the school nurse or school screening person and they will check into it.

How can I prevent the spread of head lice in the classroom?

Avoid activities that promote head to head contact. It is unlikely but possible that lice are shared through the sharing of items, like hats, that have been in contact with the head. The room can be vacuumed at the end of the day. Soft items where students may rest their heads, should be bagged for 2-3 weeks. Slick items in the classroom do not need special attention. Single lockers are better so that clothing such as coats do not touch. If you have shared lockers in your class, you may ask a student to move their items for a period of time. Encourage all students to keep their personal items in their locker. Students clothing items piled in a heap should be avoided when possible. If students obtain clothing items from the lost and found, we encourage them to wash and dry them before wearing. A lot of staff prefer to wear their hair up, if they have long hair, during the time there are students in class with live lice. Spraying furniture with a pesticide is discouraged and against our IPM policy.

What is the school policy on head lice?

Bozeman School District does not have a no nit policy. Students with live lice are sent home to be treated, but going home may not happen until the end of the day. Students with live lice are encouraged to use an over the counter lice shampoo but are not required. They are checked the next day, when convenient, to ensure that live lice are not present. The school tries to monitor these student until they are lice and nit free. Both the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) and the National Association of School Nurses (NASN) advocate that no nit policies should be discontinued. These no nit policies can cause a lot of unnecessary school absences. We do still send home class education and notification letters to students K-5 as needed. A nurse or school designee will check other students in the class (K-5), as deemed necessary and time permits. Classroom checks are quick and not definitive of the absence of lice in the classroom or on the student. Students are not allowed to wear hats to avoid getting lice. Adhere to your school's normal hat guideline.

When taking students on an overnight field trip, some places may require that students be checked for lice before sleeping in their facility. Check with your facility for their policy. If students are going to sleep together in the same bed or in close proximity to one another, you may consider monitoring for head lice before you go.

Does my room need special cleaning?

Not usually. We do try to avoid the piles of clothes, so sending some clothes home if lockers are too full may be justified. If the child has been in your class in the last 1-2 days, vacuuming the rugs and soft furniture is helpful. Bagging soft items that cannot be washed or vacuumed is ideal. Bags do not need to be exposed to hot or cold weather, just bagged long enough to interrupt the life cycle of the nits and lice. Wiping out of the lockers may make you feel better but probably does not kill or catch any live lice. Lice live on people, not in buildings.

Where can I get more information?

- BSD7.org under Health Services and head lice
- <https://www.cdc.gov/parasites/lice/head/index.html>
- <https://identify.us.com/>