From the Nurse…

Every year cases of head lice are found in our community. When children spend time together playing, learning, and socializing, cases of head lice are often identified. We want to help parents and guardians to increase their awareness regarding head lice prevention, detection and treatment. We encourage you to reference the Health Services portion of the D303 Website for information regarding the control and management of head lice. It is important to note that not all parents tell their school nurse, teacher or principal that their child has lice, thus, your school staff may not be aware of a particular case. Such reporting is not required, thus, a group of parents may be aware that their child's school mate has experienced lice, but the school has not been notified.

Anyone can get head lice. Head lice is primarily transmitted through direct head-to-head contact. Lice can also be transmitted from sharing hats, brushes, and other personal items. Transmission in the school setting is rare according to the Center for Disease Control. More commonly, children get head lice from siblings, playmates, and from sharing pillows at pajama parties. Thus, although transmission in schools is rare, identification is often made in the school setting. It is important for parents to know that head lice are a problem in many communities and do not reflect poor hygiene or social status. Most importantly, parents are integral in the prevention and detection of head lice in their children. To prevent the spread of this communicable condition, please check your child(ren) regularly for evidence of lice. If you should discover a case of head lice, please notify your child's health office as well as their outside activity directors. The nurses in the health office will assist you in caring for this problem by helping you identify a probable case and seek out resources for care.

The district approach to lice management in the school settings is outlined for you on the website previously mentioned. This approach is based on scientific and medical evidence that supports the education process. With regard to preventative treatment, parents are encouraged to seek guidance from their health care provider prior to using any treatment options. Since mass school screenings do not reduce the incidence of head lice in school settings, are deemed insensitive/invasive by some parents, and take students away from the academic setting, such screenings are not conducted in schools. Research clearly indicates that a "no lice" "no nit" policy for schools hinders academic attendance and performance, while doing little to change the incidence of lice in a school setting. In accordance with the Illinois State Board of Education's stance, students are not excluded from school because they are identified with having lice. The Illinois Dept. of Public Health and CDC deems head lice "a public nuisance" ; it is not a disease and therefore not reportable. It is important to keep in mind that the life cycle of a louse is 3 to 4 weeks, therefore, by the time live lice are identified in a student in our school setting, the student has had an infestation for many days and has likely been in many community settings. In other words, the child has come into contact with many people in many settings with the potential that he/she has been in a variety of settings in the community during this timeframe. If there is a cluster (two or more cases of lice identified in one classroom over a few weeks' period), the health office will send a courtesy letter home to parents to notify them of these findings. Remember, most cases of lice are identified at school, not transmitted in school, and this letter simply alerts parents to the finding.

Like so many health related matters, prevention is key. Teach your child to avoid head-to-head contact with friends in all settings and to avoid sharing personal items such as hairbrushes and hats. The nurses in the health office maintain strict confidentiality on all student concerns, and therefore we are not at liberty to share personal student information on this matter. We thank you in advance for collaborating with us to prevent the spread of lice among children in all community settings. If you have questions or concerns please do not hesitate to call.

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