

ANACORTES SCHOOL DISTRICT #103

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Guidelines for the Control of Head Lice

The Anacortes School District is committed to maximizing students' academic performance and physical wellbeing in a healthy and safe environment. The District recognizes that head lice (pediculosis) infestations do not pose a health hazard, are not a sign of uncleanliness, and are not responsible for the spread of any disease. However, outdated policies cause many unnecessary absences from school with potential negative effects on academic performance. Misinformation about head lice causes anxiety for parents and school staff.

The District defines a healthy and safe environment as one in which adults work together to provide the following environmental factors established by current research as necessary for the health and wellbeing of students with head lice:

- Educating staff, students, and parents/guardians about head lice
- Establishing evidence based management for students with head lice

The goals of providing a healthy and safe environment for student with head lice are to:

- Maximize academic performance
- Minimize absence due to unnecessary exclusion of students with head lice

WHAT IS IT

Head lice (pediculosis) are small insects about 1/8 of an inch or approximately the size of a sesame seed. They are grayish-brown in color and do not have wings. They have six legs on their upper body that allow them to crawl very fast. Lice are not able to jump, swim, or fly. They live in the hair on the head and feed on blood through the skin of the scalp. They lay eggs called "nits" on hair strands near the scalp. Lice live approximately 30 days and lay approximately six eggs per day. The nits hatch in seven to ten days and the cycle repeats itself.

WHO GETS IT AND HOW

Anyone can get head lice. It is not an indication of dirtiness nor should it be shameful. Three to six million Americans are affected each year, primarily preschool and school age children. Any place children get together, such as schools, preschools, and day care centers, they are at risk for getting head lice. Lice spread from person to person by crawling. This can happen by:

- Head to head contact
- Sharing hair ties, headbands or barrettes
- Sharing hats, coats, scarves
- Sharing combs and brushes
- Sharing helmets and headphones
- Contact with infested bedding, towels, or toys

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Your child may complain of their head itching or you may notice frequent scratching of the head. Check your child's hair under a bright light, such a direct sunlight or a florescent lamp. Since lice are small and fast they are difficult to find. Look for the teardrop shaped nits attached to the hair strand near the scalp. A nit may be cream, brown, gray, yellow or clear colored. They are glued to the hair and can not be flicked off or moved easily. Lice lay their eggs in the warm moist areas of the head such as the hair at the back of the neck and around the ears. Look in these areas first, and then check the rest of the scalp and hair.

TREATMENT

Head lice are treated with special lice killing products applied to the hair. Most of these products are insecticides and must be used only as directed. Some over the counter brand names are: Nix, Rid, Clear and Pronto. Prescription treatment products are also available from your physician. Check with your physician before any treatment if you are pregnant or a child is less than two years old. After treating the child, all the eggs or nits must be removed with a special nit comb, your fingers, or tweezers. Very bright light such as sunlight or a florescent lamp and a magnifying glass will make finding them easier. All the nits must be removed, as the treatment products do not kill all the eggs. If not removed, they will hatch and start a new infestation. Re-treatment may be necessary in seven days. All household members must be checked and treated if lice or nits are found.

Since lice may crawl or hair with nits can fall off the head, it is important to clean the environment. Thoroughly vacuum all carpeting, furniture and car interiors. Wash in hot water and dry on hot setting: all recently used clothes, hats, scarves, coats, bedding, pillows, hair ties and washable stuffed animals if the child sleeps with them. If an item is not washable, vacuum it thoroughly.

Lice are communicable so it is important to report all cases to your child's school and day-care providers. Your child must be free of all lice before returning to school or day care.

PREVENTION

- Check your child's hair daily at first, then weekly
- Teach your child not to share hair care items, hats, or hair ornaments
- Wash hair frequently and brush thoroughly daily
- Keep long hair tied up or pulled back
- Teach your child not to share towels, pillows, or blankets
- Wash coats and hats frequently

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

National Pediculosis Association
P.O. Box 610189
Newton, MA 02161
1-781-449-NITS
1-888-542-3634 (Product ordering only)
1-781-647-5338
<http://www.headlice.org>

American Head Lice Information Center
Sawyer-Mac Productions
80 Ash Street
Weston, MA 02193
Makers of "Licemeister" nit comb and "Head Lice to Dead Lice" Video
<http://www.headliceinfo.com>