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Head Lice

Dear Parents,

There has been a case of head lice within your child's classroom and your child may have been exposed. We are bringing this to your attention because head lice can spread rapidly within a school unless all affected children are promptly treated. Delay in identifying and treating all affected children can result in a cycle of repeated infestation with treated children rapidly becoming re-infected.

What are Head Lice

They are tiny greyish white insects that live in the hair and feed on the scalp. The female lays her eggs (the nits) on the hair close to the scalp. 7 to 10 days later the nits hatch and live 20 to 30 days during which time the female can produce 250 to 300 eggs. The empty nits are white in colour. They remain firmly glued to the hair and become more obvious as the hair grows, carrying them further from the scalp.

How Could My child Get Head Lice?

Anyone can pick up head lice. However, infestation is most common among children who often put heads together during play allowing the lice walk from one head to the next. Lice can also be passed indirectly through the common use of brushes, combs, and hats. Head lice do not reflect standards of hygiene in the home or at school. They are just as willing to live in clean hair as in an unclean head.

How Do I Know If My Child Has Head Lice?

Head scratching is usually the first sign that a child has head lice. By the time a child is consciously irritated by their presence, the lice will have been there for quite a while. It is better to check your child's hair on a regular basis. This should be done, using a special fine-toothed comb (available from your chemist) and combing the hair carefully down over a white towel or cloth. Adult lice can be removed in this way and will be seen as dark oval specks as they fall onto the towel.

The hair should also be checked for the presence of nits, pearly grey specks smaller than a grain of caster sugar. There are most commonly found around the nape of the neck and behind the ears. They stick firmly to the hair. If you see a white speck on the hair shaft, gently place the hair between two fingers and slide the fingers down along it. Dandruff or dust will readily come away. Nits stick and can be felt as the fingers pass over them.

What Should I Do If I Find Lice or Nits?

A variety of effective preparations, shampoos and lotions, are available at the chemist. It is important that the instructions are accurately followed. Shampoos kill the head lice but do not kill the eggs/nits and must be used repeatedly until all hatched nits are killed. The lotions applied correctly, kill the nits and the hatched lice. Nits remaining in the hair after a treatment programme such as this should be dead. However, to ensure that none have escaped, it is a good idea to wash the hair with one of the head lice shampoos 7 to 10 days after the initial treatment. Getting rid of the nits is difficult. A solution of vinegar and water applied to the hair helps loosen the nits, which then can be removed using a fine-toothed nit removal comb.

Personal clothing, bed linens, and anything that might have become infested, should be washed in Hot water where possible. (The Hot Cycle of most washing machines is adequate). Brushes or combs should either be boiled for 10 minutes or soaked in a dilute bleach solution for 1 hour. As head lice pass rapidly from one family member to another it is a good idea to treat the whole family at the same time.

Thank you for giving this your attention. Your family doctor or chemist will be able to answer any further questions that you might have concerning head lice and the available lotions and shampoos.

Sincerely,

Eimear Hennessy, Principal