

# ***Head Lice in Children:***

*A Real Head Scratcher for Parents*

*A Presentation by the  
National Association of School Nurses*



School and  
Community  
Resources  
to Avoid and  
Take Control of  
Head Lice





# What Are Head Lice?

- Parasites that survive by feeding on human blood
- Lice inject small amounts of saliva and remove small amounts of blood from the scalp every few hours<sup>1</sup>
- Condition is medically known as “pediculosis”



<sup>1</sup> Frankowski, B.L., Weiner, L.B., the Committee on School Health, the Committee on Infectious Disease (September 2002). American Academy of Pediatrics Clinical Report: Guidance for the Clinician in Rendering Pediatric Care: Head Lice. Pediatrics, 110 (3).



## Prevalence in Children

Each year **6 to 12 million** children between the **ages of 3 and 12** years of age will be infested with head lice<sup>1,5</sup>



About **one in every 100 U.S elementary school children** will be infested with head lice<sup>4</sup>



1 Frankowski, B.L., Weiner, L.B., the Committee on School Health, the Committee on Infectious Disease (September 2002). American Academy of Pediatrics Clinical Report: Guidance for the Clinician in Rendering Pediatric Care: Head Lice. Pediatrics, 110 (3).

4 Pollack, R.J. The Role of the School in Battling Head Lice. Our Children Magazine

5 Williams, L., Reichert, A., MacKenzie, W., Hightower, A., & Blake, P. (2001). Lice, nits, and school policy. Pediatrics. 107(5). 1011-1015.



# How Do You Spot Head Lice?

- Generally found on the scalp, around the ears and at the back of the neck<sup>2</sup>
- Adult louse is about the size of a sesame seed and can be a reddish brown color<sup>2</sup>
- Eggs, or nits, are smaller and are silver in color<sup>3</sup>



<sup>2</sup> Head Lice Control. Beyond Pesticides/NCAMP fact sheet.

<sup>3</sup> Hansen, R.C (September 2004). Overview: The State of Head Lice Management and Control. Am J Manag Care, 10, S250-S263.



# Signs and Symptoms

- Head scratching caused by sensitivity to the louse's saliva is the most common symptom<sup>1</sup>
- Red bite marks may also be seen, particularly at night behind the ears at the back of the neck<sup>2</sup>
- Dead eggs and the remnants of hatched eggs remain firmly glued onto the hair for weeks, months, or even years<sup>4</sup>



<sup>1</sup> Frankowski, B.L., Weiner, L.B., the Committee on School Health, the Committee on Infectious Disease (September 2002). American Academy of Pediatrics Clinical Report: Guidance for the Clinician in Rendering Pediatric Care: Head Lice. Pediatrics, 110 (3).

<sup>2</sup> Head Lice Control. Beyond Pesticides/NCAMP fact sheet.

<sup>4</sup> Pollack, R.J. The Role of the School in Battling Head Lice. Our Children Magazine



# ***How Are Head Lice Spread?***

- Transmission can occur during direct contact or through the sharing of personal items<sup>1</sup>
  - Hats
  - Helmets
  - Brushes / combs
- More commonly found in children due to their close contact with each other<sup>4</sup>
- Infestation can occur throughout the year
  - A peak is generally experienced during summer and back-to-school time periods<sup>3</sup>



1 Frankowski, B.L., Weiner, L.B., the Committee on School Health, the Committee on Infectious Disease (September 2002). American Academy of Pediatrics Clinical Report: Guidance for the Clinician in Rendering Pediatric Care: Head Lice. Pediatrics, 110 (3).

3 Hansen, R.C (September 2004). Overview: The State of Head Lice Management and Control. Am J Manag Care, 10, S250-S263.

4 Pollack, R.J. The Role of the School in Batting Head Lice. Our Children Magazine



# ***Impact of Head Lice on the Community***

- Annually, millions of dollars spent on
  - Pediculicides and lice combs
  - Physician visits
  - Parental time away from work
- Study of attendance records found 12 to 24 million school days are lost annually in U.S. due to exclusion of students for nits<sup>6</sup>
  - Early absenteeism is related to increased drop out
- Embarrassment and social stigma accompany infestation<sup>6</sup>



<sup>6</sup> National Association of School Nurses Position Statement.



# Debunking Head Lice Myths

**Myth:** Lice are a sign of poor hygiene

**Fact:** Lice are *not* caused by poor hygiene and they infest *all* socioeconomic groups, races, genders and ages



**Myth:** Lice are highly infectious

**Fact:** Lice do *not* transmit disease





## ***How to Prevent Head Lice***

- Preventing head lice entirely can be difficult
- Parents can encourage their children not to share personal items such as hats, helmets, brushes or combs
- Children should also avoid head-to-head contact at school and on the playground, and avoid sleepovers and slumber parties during lice outbreaks.
- Wash in hot water or dry-clean all recently worn clothing, hats, used bedding, and towels used by anyone having lice or thought to be exposed to lice.
- Personal care items such as combs, brushes and hair clips should also be washed in hot water.
  - This will help decrease the likelihood of transmission from one child to another





# Head Lice Treatments

- Traditional treatments include <sup>2,3</sup>
  - Nit picking with a fine-tooth comb
  - Over-the-counter and prescription products
    - Many contain a pesticide that can be neurotoxic when used inappropriately
    - Generally safe and effective but like all medical products, must be used with caution, and as directed
  - Home therapies
    - Olive oil
    - Mayonnaise



<sup>2</sup> Head Lice Control. Beyond Pesticides/NCAMP fact sheet.

<sup>3</sup> Hansen, R.C (September 2004). Overview: The State of Head Lice Management and Control. Am J Manag Care, 10, S250-S263.



# ***Head Lice Treatments***

- New product approved by FDA
  - First and only prescription medication for head lice that is non-neurotoxic
  - Unique mechanism of action, as suggested by laboratory studies, kills head lice by asphyxiation (smothers the lice)





# ***Head Lice Treatments***

- Most treatments require two applications
  - First to kill the lice
  - Later to kill the lice babies (nymphs)





## ***Role of the School Nurse***

- Educate the school community regarding head lice management
- If you suspect that a student has head lice, advise his or her parents and encourage them to speak with their healthcare provider
- Safeguard the education of every child while managing head lice infestations in schools





## ***NASN Position: No to “no nits” policies***

- Pediculosis should not disrupt the education process<sup>6</sup>
- Students with head lice should return to school the first day after appropriate treatment





## ***For More Information***

- Talk to your school nurse, doctor or pharmacist
- Log on to [www.NASN.org](http://www.NASN.org)





This program is supported through an unrestricted educational grant to the National Association of School Nurses from Sciele Pharma, Inc., a Shionogi company.

