



Head Lice Q&A

Pediculosis, more commonly known as head lice are small parasitic insects, approximately 2.1–3.3 mm in length, that cling to hair shafts on the heads of human beings. They spend their entire life cycle sucking blood for nutrition. Lice infestations are spread most commonly by close person-to-person contact. Dogs, cats, and other pets do not play a role in the transmission of human lice. Lice move by crawling; they cannot hop or fly. They infest the head and neck and attach their eggs (nits) to the base of the hair shaft. Lice cannot live away from a host for more than 48 hours nor do they carry or spread disease. Regardless of the cleanliness in any given home environment or despite regular hair washing, they persist in being a common problem particularly among elementary and middle school aged children.

Following are several of the most prevalent questions regarding how the Robbinsville Schools handle head lice.

1. Has there been a recent change in the district practice regarding head lice?

The district bases our practice on the recommendations of various institutions such as Center for Disease Control, American Academy of Pediatrics, Harvard School of Public Health, and the National Association of School Nurses. Additionally, we maintain open lines of communication with other districts in New Jersey as a way to stay current on statewide best practice. As recommendations for best practice evolve, so does the district's practice. Based on recent recommendations the district no longer conducts whole class screenings. Please refer to question #4 for more specific detail.

2. Do the Robbinsville Schools notify parents if a case of head lice has been detected?

Yes. Beginning in January 2014, Sharon and Pond resumed notifying parents if a case of head lice has been discovered in school. This notification is sent to the parents of children in the same grade level as the infected student. It is sent via each school's email distribution system with the intent of increasing parental vigilance and, ultimately, prevention of additional outbreaks. The identification of the infected child is kept confidential.

3. If a child is found to have lice, will he/she be excluded from school?

Yes. Although the school district does not follow a strict no nit policy, meaning we do not conduct mass screening for nits, if a child is determined to have lice he/she will be excluded from school and checked by a nurse upon his/her return. If upon his/her return, a child continues to show evidence of infestation, including nits, he/she will be excluded until the signs dissipate.

4. Will the whole class of a child found with lice be screened by the school nurses?

No. In the past the school nurses performed head checks of the entire class when a case of head lice was discovered. The district no longer conducts mass screenings because they have been found to create a false sense of security among families. When a parent receives a lice notification letter, he/she should regularly monitor his/her child for signs of infestation.

5. Do Sharon Elementary and Pond Road Middle Schools adhere to separate conventions with regard to head lice?

In the past each school handled cases of head lice in slightly different ways. The district is seeking to standardize the protocol to have it reflect evidence-based practice.

6. In what other ways is the district seeking to educate the school community on head lice?

There are resources posted on Pond and Sharon's website detailing best practice as well as symptoms and treatment of lice.