

NEWS from the Nurses Office: What are Head Lice?

Dear Bernards Township School District,

At this time of year as we return from our summer vacations, camp adventures, and get ready to begin a new school year, the elementary school nurses are asking that parents take some time to screen their children for head lice. We often receive reports of head lice a few weeks after the school year has begun and assume that the child has gotten lice from school. We are hoping that with this notice, parents will take some time to screen their children before they return back to school with the goal of early detection and treatment. As a reminder, many times the nurse is not notified of head lice, therefore, it is important to be vigilant at all times and not rely on a ‘high alert’ letter from the classroom. Head checks should be part of your child’s routine hygiene regime.

The following is important information regarding head lice. Head lice are wingless bugs that can live on the scalp and hair of humans. Lice do not live for more than 1-2 days off of the human head and they do not live on animals. Head lice do not jump, hop or fly, and are most commonly passed by direct head-to-head contact. Activities such as hugging, play wrestling or sharing a bed are all ways to contract head lice. All offer opportunities for lice to be spread between friends and family members. (Pollack, 2007) It is possible, though not common, to pass head lice by sharing personal items such as combs, pillows, hats or brushes. Head lice eggs, or “nits” look like sesame seeds hanging from the hair like tiny droplets. Nits closer than 1/4 inch or width of little finger from the scalp could hatch into lice. Nits farther away have already hatched or will not hatch and are therefore of little consequence. (CDC, 2013)

Head lice, while causing a very itchy head, do not cause illness or disease. They are purely a nuisance. Children can reduce their risk of getting head lice by avoiding head-to-head contact with friends (hugging or snuggling to read a book), by tying long hair back, and by not sharing personal items. You can assist in early detection of head lice, by routinely checking your child. We often are told, “I don’t know how or what to look for.” Here is a link to a You Tube video that may be helpful.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mAsfE8AWxzU>

If detected, head lice can be treated by closely following the instructions on special lice shampoo (found at the local pharmacy or supermarket). Although time-consuming, the very best way to ensure your child has gotten rid of head lice is to carefully remove all lice and eggs you find in the hair. Almost ALL of your time and effort in removing head lice should be spent on the head and hair. Washing pillowcases and sheets in hot water is helpful. Spending time vacuuming carpets/carseats/couches may keep your house clean but is not necessary for lice removal, as lice only live a short time off of the head and rarely leave the head anyhow unless to crawl into someone else’s hair. (CDC, 2013) If you have any questions or concerns about head lice, or would like guidance on treatment, please contact me here at school.

Sincerely,
School Nurse