

# Standards of care

## Pediculosis (lice) management in the school setting

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Pediculosis is an infestation with the human head and body louse. Adult head lice are roughly 2–3 mm long. Head lice infest the head and neck and attach their eggs to the base of the hair shaft. Lice move by crawling; they cannot hop or fly. They are not known to spread disease (CDC, 2023).

Head lice infestation is spread mostly by close person-to-person contact. Dogs, cats, and other pets do not play a role in the transmission of human lice.

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### Pediculosis treatment

Several effective pediculicides (lice-killing products) are available. The school nurse should maintain their knowledge of available products and instructions for use. Parents and school staff should be instructed to follow the specific product instructions.

Evidence indicates that many school policies on head lice are more harmful when students are ostracized which can lead to increased bullying and lower school performance. The school nurse should work with school administrators to develop a policy that will meet the needs of both the student and district.

The school nurse plays an integral role in assisting students and families with cases of pediculosis. It is their responsibility to know the district policy; changes in standards of care; and educate school personnel, families, and students about what to do.

### Pediculosis management

“No-nit” policies should be discouraged as this results in unnecessary absenteeism. Classroom screenings should also be discouraged because they are often inaccurate, not cost-effective, and notification may be a breach of confidentiality (NASN, 2023). If a case is found the child should be allowed to remain in school. The parents of that student should be contacted at the end of the day and given instructions on evidenced-based treatment options.

The school nurse should instruct the family on application of pediculicide, either prescribed medication or over-the-counter

School nurses should determine their individual scope of practice regarding new pediculosis treatment therapies.

preparations according to package directions. Families should be taught how to assess their children for suspected head lice.

To prevent lice from spreading:

- Students should not be allowed to share hair ornaments, brushes, or combs.
- Hats, coats, scarves, and the like should be hung or placed individually for each child and not stacked or hung on top of those belonging to other children.
- Wall hooks, if used, should be far apart enough that garments hung on adjacent hooks do not touch. Sometimes plastic bags with draw strings are hung to contain garments if hooks are not far enough apart.
- Headgear, including headsets, should be removed from use if lice are present in the class. If lice are an ongoing problem, headgear and headsets should be stored in an air-tight plastic bag for 2 weeks and not reused until the problem is resolved.
- Carpeted areas in classrooms should be vacuumed frequently and thoroughly.
- Lice killing sprays are generally unnecessary.
- Fumigation of classrooms or buses is not recommended.

## References

Center for Disease Control and Prevention. (2023). Pediculosis. Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/dpdx/pediculosis/index.html>.

National Association of School Nurses. (2023). *Head lice management in the school setting* (Position Statement). Silver Spring, MD: Author. Retrieved from <https://www.nasn.org/nasn-resources/professional-practice-documents/position-statements/ps-head-lice>.