

SWS – Lice Policy

Background

Infestations of head lice are a common nuisance among young children. However, they rarely (if ever) cause direct harm, and are not known to transmit infectious agents from person-to-person. Thus, they are not considered to be a medical or a public health problem. "The greatest harm associated with head lice results from the well-intentioned but misguided use of caustic or toxic substances to eliminate the lice. A few lice on the head should not cause alarm; rather, they present an opportunity for parents to spend the needed time with their children in order to find and remove the offending insects." (Harvard School of Public Health)

Response

An outbreak of head lice in a class thus does not constitute an emergency. Bear in mind that a child who is discovered to have head lice will already have had lice for several weeks prior to its being discovered.

The Student

1. If you find that your child has lice or nits (eggs), please contact the school office.
2. A student who is found to have lice will generally be allowed to remain in school and in class until the end of the day. The Dean of Education (or her designee) may on occasion make a decision to send a child home if the infestation is severe. We will notify parent/guardians, and also examine siblings and close contacts of a student with live lice. We will make every effort to keep the affected student's identity confidential.
3. Choice of treatment approach is up to the parent – there are many options. We will provide treatment information from the Seattle and King County Department of Public Health. It is also a good idea to check with your child's doctor for recommendations. We encourage but do not require removal of nits as part of treatment.
4. After home treatment, the student must be checked again by a staff member in the main office before returning to the classroom (generally the next school day). Parents should remain with their child until that check is complete. Students who have been properly treated are not required to be nit-free. However, if our check at this time indicates remaining live lice, then the student will need to return home with the parent for re-treatment.
5. The students will need to come with the parent to the main office again after 8-10 days for a second check, to assure that there are no more live lice. The parent/guardian should continue to check at home for 21 days.

The Class

- Our practice is to inform families in the class when a child in that class has lice. In the event that an affected child has a sibling in the school, we will also check the sibling for lice. If the check indicates no lice, then we do not inform the families in the sibling's class.
- Occasionally we will receive a report that children may have been exposed to lice via a party or sleepover. We will pass along such news if requested to do so.
- Class-wide screenings are strongly discouraged by our sources, because they have not proven to be effective (see both the AAP and Harvard School of Public Health papers, listed above). We may occasionally conduct a class-wide screening at our discretion, in the case of a significant outbreak.
- It remains the parent's responsibility to ensure that children come to school lice-free. Our office staff is happy to provide education and assistance to parents any time, including lessons on how to check your child's head, and what to look for. Feel free to ask.

Sources informing our policy (all available via the internet, or by request from our main office):

American Academy of Pediatrics, Clinical Report, September, 2002
Harvard School of Public Health, Head Lice: Information and FAQ, August, 2000
Seattle Public Schools, Head Lice Guidelines, revised April, 2005
Seattle and King County Department of Public Health, Head Lice, June, 2008