



Head Lice: St. John Paul II Policy and Information

The head lice has been around for thousands of years and affects 6-12 million people a year in the U.S. It is the second most common childhood affliction after the common cold. St. John Paul II's head lice policy is based on the guidelines from the Texas Department of State Health Services and recommendations by the American Academy of Pediatrics, the National Association of School Nurses and Centers for Disease Control. St. John Paul II does not conduct mass screenings for head lice as this interrupts instructional time. In addition, if a case of head lice is reported, the school does not send notification letters to parents on a large scale because research shows that this practice leads only to over-treatment and does not lessen outbreaks.

As part of the day –to–day monitoring of your child's health and hygiene, I encourage you to check your child's head for signs of head lice and their eggs (nits). Remember, head lice cannot live off of the human head for more than 24 hours.

Sit your child in the bright light and inspect your child's head.

If lice are present, they are usually found around the crown of the head. They are about the size of a sesame seed and reddish brown in color. Sometimes you won't see them as they run very fast. Remember lice cannot fly.

The nits are attached to the hair shaft and cannot be easily removed. They have to be picked off the hair shaft. (This is where the term nit-picking came from.) Nits are oval and grayish-white in color. They are found close to the scalp or nape of the neck. Nits found lower down on the hair shaft are usually not viable and probably will not hatch.

Itching of the scalp and the nape of the neck is a symptom of head lice and an immediate referral to the clinic at St. John Paul II. However, itching is not always present so frequent head checks at home are important!

Instruct children to not share brushes, combs, headbands, sweatshirts and sweaters.

Schools are not the most common places where head lice are spread! Anything that involves head to head contact such as sleepovers is thought to be a more common method of spread from child to child. Sharing baseball helmets can be a method of transmission, but is thought to be unlikely as the louse cannot grab on to smooth surfaces.

Treating the whole family "just in case" is not recommended. Head lice products are pesticides which are toxic if overused. This is especially true for young children.

Students may return to school after one treatment of the head lice product. Please follow the product's instructions to the letter.

The most important part of the treatment is the nit removal. I suggest buying a nit comb called "LiceMeister." It is available online and at drug stores. Every day for 8-10 days comb through wet hair. Use a conditioner to prevent tangles. The LiceMeister can also be used for the day to day monitoring of your child's head

At the end of 8-10 days it is recommended that you retreat with the lice product.

Do not use sprays or bombs to fumigate your house. They will harm your children and are unnecessary.

Wash your child's bed linens and put items that cannot be washed in the dryer or have them dry cleaned.

Vacuuming is the single most effective way of removing head lice from furniture and carpets.