

Head Lice

Head Start Performance Standards

§ 1302.47 (b) (1) (ii)

Policy

Head lice infestations are common in early childhood education settings because children are more likely to share personal items such as clothing and are often in close physical contact. It is the responsibility of staff to confront misinformation about head lice and educate parents about prevention, identification and safe treatment of head lice. Weekly head lice checks will be performed by Head Start staff in a manner that is private, respectful, and protects the child's self-esteem.

Head Lice Definition

Head lice are tiny, grayish tan, wingless insects that crawl and cling to the hair shaft causing the scalp to itch. Lice can not jump or fly. Nits are the eggs of head lice. They are usually grayish-white or translucent in color, oval shaped, and firmly attached to individual hairs near the scalp with a type of glue-like substance. Nits can be found anywhere on the hairs of the head but are most often found behind the ears and on the back of the head and neck.

Procedure

Identification

The Health Services Supervisor is responsible for training staff at centers on the head lice procedure during pre-service training each year. Every Head Start site will conduct a check of children's heads a minimum of once per week. Staff must use craft sticks or disposable gloves when checking heads. The craft sticks or gloves are discarded before going on to the next child's head. If there are more than two children with head lice in a classroom, head checks will be conducted daily until the situation is resolved. Any adult in the classroom with either symptoms (itching, scratching), or expressed concerns that they may be infected will be offered a head check by Head Start staff.

Parent(s)/guardian(s) are given information about head lice identification and the head lice procedure during orientation, or for families that start later in the year, at the first home visit.

Treatment

When a child is found to have *live* head lice, center staff will follow these steps.

1. Move the child away from the other children. Take care to protect the child's self-esteem. The child should be given something interesting to do while center staff call the child's parent/guardian and ask them, or the emergency designee, to pick up the child.

Give the **Head Lice Exposure notice** (marked "Your child has head lice") to the family and review it with them. Inform the parent/guardian that the child must be *free of live lice* and have *no nits 3/4 inch or less from the scalp* before the child can return to school. Head Start staff must recheck the child's head before they attend school/center.

Students with nits (eggs) only may remain in school that day.

- a. Parent will be contacted and given the choice of picking up the student immediately or allowing the student to remain for the day. The student must be treated before returning to school on subsequent days.

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Washington County, Oregon**

- b. Give the **Head Lice Exposure notice** (marked “Your child has head lice”) to the family and review it with them. Inform the parent/guardian that the child must be *free of live lice* and have *no nits 3/4 inch or less from the scalp* before the child can return to school Head Start staff must recheck the child’s head before they attend school/center.

The following supplemental measures are options, not requirements, since head lice is primarily spread from head-to-head contact.

- Articles that were in contact with the infested individual can be laundered and dried ~~in~~ on the hot settings, as well as clothing and bedding.
 - Toys, personal articles, bedding, other fabrics, and upholstered furniture that cannot be laundered with hot water and a dryer can be kept away from people for more than two days if there is a concern about lice having crawled from an infested child onto these articles.
 - Floors, carpets, mattresses, and furniture can be vacuumed. Because head lice can only live for one to two days away from the scalp, chemical treatment of the environment is not necessary.
 - Although the sharing of bike helmets is not likely to spread head lice, staff members are advised to wipe the lining and straps with a damp cloth, particularly during head lice outbreaks. Detergents, cleaning chemicals, or sanitizers should not be applied to helmets or helmet straps because they may cause deterioration of the protective parts.
2. If head lice reoccur in the same family, check with the parent or guardian to determine what measures have already been tried. Review possible sources of infestation: other family members or visitors, and/or the childcare situation. Staff will work with families to overcome possible barriers such as a lack of money for treatment shampoo, vision impairment in adults that affects their ability to remove nits, lack of lighting in the home and a busy schedule in families with other children in the home to take care of.
3. Make a referral to the Health Services Supervisor if head lice occur in the same family more than twice *or* if the original case is not resolved within one week. Funds may be used to help families treat head lice problem if no other resources are available.