



# New York State Association of School Nurses

[www.nysasn.org](http://www.nysasn.org)

"Caring for New York's Future"

## Position Statement

### Pediculosis Capitis

#### HISTORY

Head lice are most common in children ages 3 to 12 years of age and affect all socioeconomic groups. Pediculosis, otherwise known as head lice, is the cause of much embarrassment and unnecessary loss of school days. According to the Committee on Infectious Diseases of the American Academy of Pediatrics, "no-nit" policies, whereby schools and child-care centers require children be free of nits before they return, have not been effective in controlling pediculosis capitis transmission and are not recommended (AAP, 2009). The human head louse does not transmit disease, but can be socially stigmatizing and places a significant burden on patients, parents, and society (Martinez-Diaz, & Mancini, 2010, p.2).

#### RATIONALE:

##### **Facts about Head Lice:**

- The most common symptom of head lice is itching with occasional secondary bacterial skin infections.
- Head lice may be transmitted by direct head-to-head contact or fomites, most notably hair grooming items and headgear (Martinez-Diaz & Mancini, 2010, p. 6).
- The adult louse is 2 to 3 mm long.
- Lice cannot jump or fly, they crawl. Live lice feed on the human scalp.
- The female louse can live up to 3 to 4 weeks and can lay ten eggs (nits) a day. The eggs hatch in 10 to 14 days.
- Head lice usually survive less than 1 day away from the scalp.
- Nits that are more than ¼ inch from the scalp are generally not viable.
- Along with head lice treatment, manual removal of nits at home is essential as no pediculicide is 100% ovicidal.
- Head lice screening programs have not had a significant effect on the incidence of head lice in the school setting over time and have not proven to be cost effective (Frankowski & Bocchini, 2010).
- Misdiagnosis of head lice is common, therefore the school nurse or trained personnel should be performing screenings.
- Schools are encouraged to have policies regarding head lice.
- Approximately 6 to 12 million children, age 3 to 12, years have infestations each year (Frankowski & Weiner, 2002).

- Head lice are not a health hazard or a sign of uncleanliness and are not responsible for the spread of any disease (Frankowski & Weiner, 2002, p.638).

## CONCLUSION

It is the position of the New York State Association of School Nurses that school nurses provide education on head lice in an effort to decrease occurrences and that no healthy child should be excluded from school due to head lice. The school nurse can achieve this goal by providing students, families and staff with education on the importance of recognizing and treating head lice along with offering reassurance. "The school nurse is in a position to take the lead in eliminating school exclusion policies and, instead, incorporate evidence-based practices that reduce the stigma associated with head lice, and work to increase classroom time with an emphasis on keeping students in school" (Gordon, 2007). In addition, the school nurse should be included in school district planning of pediculosis policies.

## REFERENCES:

- American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP). (2009). *Pediculosis capitis* (head lice). In L. Pickering (Ed.), *Red book: 2009 report of the Committee on Infectious Diseases* (pp. 494-497). Elk Grove Village, IL: Author.
- Gordon, S. (2007). Shared Vulnerability: A theory of caring for children with persistent head lice. *The Journal of School Nursing*. 23(5) 283-292. doi: 10.1177/10598405070230050701.
- Frankowski, B.L., & Bocchini, J.A. (2010). Clinical Report-Head Lice. *Pediatrics*. 126(2) 392-403. Retrieved from <http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/cgi/content/abstract/126/2/392> doi:10.1542/peds.2010-1308.
- Frankowski, B., & Weiner, L. (2002). American Academy of Pediatrics: clinical report. Head lice. *Pediatrics*, 110(3), 638-643. Retrieved from EBSCOhost.
- Martinez-Diaz, G.J., & Mancini, A.J. (2010). CNE series. Head Lice Diagnosis and Therapy. *Dermatology Nursing*, 22(4), 2-8. Retrieved from EBSCOhost.