

IOWA RECOMMENDATIONS ON HEAD LICE PREVENTION AND CONTROL FOR SCHOOLS

Head lice continue to be a problem for Iowa school-aged children. School nurses may spend a disproportionate amount of their time addressing head lice issues considering that they pose no health hazard. The Iowa Department of Public Health (IDPH) recommends the following prevention and control measures for managing head lice in Iowa schools.

- 1. Discontinue routine school-based screening.** Current evidence does not support classroom or school-wide screening as a method to stop head lice transmission. Instead, schools should educate parents and staff about lice detection, treatment, and prevention. Parents should be encouraged to regularly screen their children for lice. It should be assumed that head lice are in the community and schools at all times.
- 2. Discontinue “no nit” policies.** “No-nits” policies that require a child to be free of nits before they can return to school are not recommended. Children should not be excluded from school. Head lice can be a nuisance but have not been shown to spread disease.
- 3. Children should remain in school for the rest of the day if head lice are detected.** Notify parents by phone, provide educational materials on treatment, and review treatment protocols. It is reasonable to expect that treatment be started before the child returns to school the next day.
- 4. Do not use environmental sprays or chemical cleaners at home or in the classrooms, lockers, or on gym mats or other school equipment.**
Head lice do not live “off” the body. The head louse must maintain a constant warm temperature. Only ordinary cleaning, vacuuming, and washing in hot water are needed. Do not use chemical sprays on such items as audio/video headsets, tables or mats, carpet, upholstered chairs, school bus benches, or bed linens. Sprays and other chemicals can be potentially harmful, since they can be absorbed through the skin and are irritating to the lungs of some asthmatics.
- 5. Teach and support parents in appropriate techniques for lice treatment.** The Iowa Department of Public Health advocates a two-week treatment plan that includes the use of an over-the-counter medicated shampoo which contains either permethrin or a pyrethrin. A handout for parents from the IDPH can be found at www.idph.state.ia.us/hcci/common/pdf/headlice_brochure.pdf
- 6. What if treatment with over-the-counter shampoos and use of a nit comb fails?** Physicians may prescribe stronger treatments for head lice. Re-infestation is more common than treatment failure.
- 7. Further information can be found at these websites:**
www.idph.state.ia.us/idph_universalhelp/main.aspx?system=IdphEpiManual&Context=Lice_Factsheet_Genpublic
www.cdc.gov/lice/head/ (CDC)