

# **Franklin Public Schools Non-exclusionary Policy Concerning Head Lice**



# Where did the 'no-nit' policies come from?

- No-nit policies, where students are excluded from school because of live lice and/or nits, were originally developed to stop the spread of head lice in schools.
- These policies were established years ago based on fear in response to social stigma and misconceptions about the spread of head lice rather than scientific evidence.

# Why change now?

- Head lice are rarely transmitted at school. Nits are not transmissible.
- Head lice feed on human blood – off the host they die within 24 hours. They do not fly or jump from one head, coat or backpack, etc. to another.
- The potential for misdiagnosis and the resulting improper use of pediculicides raise concerns about unsafe use of these products, specifically when no lice are present or when products are used excessively (American Academy of Pediatrics, Clinical Report – Head Lice)
- Students infested with head lice are excluded unnecessarily from school and miss valuable academic time.
- Head lice also cause parent/guardian absences from work, millions of dollars misspent on remedies, and unnecessary treatment of misdiagnosed infestations.

# What the research says...

- There is no scientific evidence that warrants exclusion of children from school for discovery of head lice or their eggs (Pollack, Kiszewski, & Spielman, 2000)
- Head lice screening programs have not been proven to have a significant effect over time on the incidence of head lice in the school setting and are not cost-effective. (American Academy of Pediatrics)
- It is the position of the National Association of School Nurses that the management of pediculosis (infestation by head lice) should not disrupt the educational process. No disease is associated with head lice, and in school transmission is considered to be rare. Children found with live head lice should remain in class. (National Association of School Nurses)
- By the time a child with an active head lice infestation has been identified, he or she may have had the infestation for one month or more and, therefore, poses little additional risk of transmission to others (Frankowski and Boochini, 2010)

## From The Centers for Disease Control...

- Students diagnosed with live head lice do not need to be sent home early from school; they can go home at the end of the day, be treated, and return to class after appropriate treatment has begun.
- Personal hygiene or cleanliness in the home or school has nothing to do with getting head lice.
- The burden of unnecessary absenteeism to the students, families and communities far outweighs the risks associated with head lice.

<http://www.cdc.gov/parasites/lice/head/schools.html>

# Fact or Fiction?

## The truths and myths about head lice...

### Fiction:

- Head lice cause disease by direct harm and/or by transmitting germs

### Fact:

- Head lice are transmissible, but the potential for epidemic spread is minimal.
- Transmission of lice occurs most often among family members due to the close proximity of living conditions.
- There are no direct infectious processes known to result from head lice infestation.
- Even though cold and flu viruses are potentially more lethal and likely to spread, school children are rarely excluded for these illnesses (Pollack, 2000).

# Fact or Fiction?

## Fiction:

- Head lice are readily shared and cause epidemics.

## Fact:

- Children who are found to have live lice are no more infectious on the day of diagnosis than they had been prior to the discovery.
- Transmission of head lice requires close personal contact, which is not common in the school setting.
- To date, no scientific literature exists to support the exclusion of children from school due to head lice infestation.
- There is a need to develop updated school policies using research-based evidence to determine the best method of treating infestations while allowing children to remain in school.

# FPS Policy 2013

- School nurses will screen any student who exhibits signs/symptoms of head lice.
- Children who are found to have live lice or nits will not be sent home from school.
- Parents will be notified before the end of the school day and advised to contact their healthcare provider for treatment options. Informational fact sheet on head lice will be provided to the parent. Classroom/grade wide notification letters will generally not be sent home unless deemed appropriate.
- Children will be allowed to return to school after treatment has begun.
- Children do not need to be screened by the school nurse prior to returning to school. Parents may request assistance from the school nurse to check their child's head after treatment.
- The presence of nits will not prevent a child from returning to school.
- Parents will be instructed to check their child's head on a regular basis to confirm treatment success or failure.



# Benefits of change...

- Minimize impact to student's time on learning
- Reduce stigma associated with head lice
- Limit unnecessary absences from school and parent's missed time from work
- Protection of student's privacy
- School nurses can take the lead in incorporating evidence-based practices that reduce the stigma associated with head lice, and work to increase classroom time with the emphasis on keeping students in school.

# Sources

- Amesbury Public Schools' Non-exclusionary Policy Concerning Head Lice, January, 2009
- Richard J. Pollack, PhD and Joan Edelstein, DrPH, RN, Head Louse Infestations: Evidence-Based Strategies and Best Practices for Tackling Head Lice, October, 2012
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
- National Association of School Nurses
- American Academy of Pediatrics
- Massachusetts Department of Public Health
- Harvard School of Public Health
- Milford Public Schools' presentation to School Committee