

## **Arlington Recreation Department**

### **Pediculosis- Head Lice**

**Head lice** are tiny insects that live only on people's scalp and hair. Head lice hatch from small eggs, called nits, that are firmly attached to individual hairs near the scalp and cannot be easily moved up or down the hair (as could specks of dandruff). Nits may be found throughout the hair but are most often located behind the ears and at the nape of the neck. Eggs hatch in 6–10 days, with new lice reaching adulthood 2–3 weeks later. The female louse, about the size of a sesame seed, typically lives for 20–30 days and lays about six eggs a day. Lice live by biting and sucking blood from the scalp. Lice can survive 1–2 days away from the scalp.

**Symptom:** The major symptom of head lice is itching. Not all persons with lice present with itching. Persistent scratching of the head and back of the neck should be cause for concern. Red bite marks and scratch marks may be observed on the scalp and neck, and a secondary bacterial infection can occur, causing oozing or crusting. Swollen neck glands may also develop.

**Transmission:** Lice are spread *only* when they crawl from person to person directly or crawl onto shared personal items such as combs, brushes, head coverings, clothing, bedding, or towels. An infested individual can transmit head lice to others continuously until undergoing treatment to kill or remove the insects and eggs. Head lice should not be considered a sign of unclean individuals or homes. They may affect individuals of any age, sex, ethnicity, and economic level. Anyone who has close contact with an infested individual or shares personal items can become infested.

**Diagnosis:** Diagnosis is usually made by detecting nits, which are tiny, pearl-gray, oval-shaped specks attached to hairs near the scalp. Use a magnifying glass and natural light when searching for them on the hair.

**Treatment:** Treatment consists of killing or removing lice on infested individuals, their surroundings, and their personal items. All household members and individuals with close physical contact should be examined for lice and, if infested, treated as recommended by their health care provider.

#### **Procedures for the Management of Children with Head Lice:**

- Children do not need to be excluded or sent home early from our program because of nits. "No nit" policies have proven to be ineffective in controlling head lice transmission. Children found to have live lice will be sent home, and may return to the program the day after they receive proper treatment (including anti-lice shampoo and combing hair thoroughly with a nit comb).
- Immediate notification of the child's parents/guardians is recommended for all confirmed cases of Lice.

- If a parent or guardian finds Lice or nits in their child's head, it should be reported to the Program Director as soon as possible.
- Arlington Recreation will review management procedures with parents and provide copies of the Arlington Public Health Lice Brochure.
- Parents will be advised to consult with their child's primary care to discuss appropriate treatment if a parent is not comfortable with treating the child without medical management.
- All parents/guardians should be informed about the time consuming nature of treatment, especially in relation to "nit picking" as the primary means to prevent reoccurrence.
- Arlington Recreation staff will check children who have recently received lice treatment, upon return to the program. Staff will look for lice and nits at that time, and periodically thereafter. This is to help support/guide parents/guardians and prevent transmission and reoccurrence. Arlington Recreation Staff is not responsible for nit removal, and will not remove nits or lice from an affected child
- The Arlington Recreation staff will decide to check heads of other children with consideration of the following factors: three or more confirmed cases of Lice in a single activity, children who are siblings and close contacts, and the child who is symptomatic for Lice.
- Every effort will be made to maintain the child's privacy and confidentiality.

### **Communication and Education:**

- If there is a case of Lice in a program, parents/guardians of children in the same program will be notified electronically via the recreation program database, or hard copy parent letter, or other effective mode of communication.
- The Recreation Department will protect the child's confidentiality with all cases of Lice.
- The Program Director will inform the Director of Recreation and consult with the Department of Health and Human Services about cases of confirmed head lice, as indicated.
- The program will prevent the spread of head lice via environmental management including clothing storage, classroom pillows, stuffed animals, carpet, head gear or equipment, and personal head accessories.

### **References:**

American Academy of Pediatrics <http://www.aap.org>  
 Massachusetts Department of Public Health <http://www.state.ma.us/dph/>  
 National Association of School Nurses <http://www.nasn.org>

