

# Lice Guide

Written by parents of Gordon Elementary students, November 2008

Many schools in Vancouver have had high occurrences of lice this Fall. From the occurrences reported, we estimate that several children in each class at Gordon have lice. To help save everyone the time, cost and disruption of a lice infestation please inform yourself and make lice checks a regular part of your weekly routine.

*Please do not encourage your children to alienate those that you know have lice – this can be very psychologically damaging for those children. Remember, you can catch the flu from across a room. You usually have to have hair to hair contact to catch lice. Please, learn to check for lice so that you can catch an infestation early, teach others how to check, and support those who are battling an infestation. As a community we can control lice occurrences in our school.*

There is a list of parents who know how to look for lice on the PAC bulletin board in the front hallway. You can learn how to check from one of them. Please add your name if you can help others.

## What are lice and nits?

Head lice (bugs) are parasitic insects that live in human hair and are highly contagious. They are about the size and colour of a sesame seed though their colour can range to medium brown. They cling to human hair and move from head to head mostly through direct hair-to-hair contact. However, they can also transfer from items that have been in contact with hair – brushes, combs, hats, wigs, clips, scarves, jackets, dress-up clothes, headbands, masks, etc. If it touches hair, don't share.

Nits, or lice eggs, are about the size of a poppy seed and the same colour range as lice (white to medium brown). They are glued to the side of the hair shaft usually within 1.5 inches of the scalp. The most common places to find nits are behind and above the ears, at the top of the neck and at the forehead but they can be anywhere.

## How to Check for Lice and Nits

*First know what you are looking for. There is a sample of a louse and a nit on the PAC bulletin board in the front hallway. You will also find many photos on the web.*

**Lice** – It is uncommon to see a louse on the hair because they move very quickly. To check for live lice wash or wet the hair, you may put in conditioner and leave it in to ease combing, comb out tangles and then comb the hair with a good lice comb (e.g. licemeister) or a good flea comb. Note: most drug store lice combs are not very effective - flea combs or good lice combs are better.

Lice slow down when wet and comb out more easily. Comb the hair in small sections from scalp to end and check the comb after each full stroke. The lice will usually rest on top of the comb but may be caught in the teeth. Checking the whole head will take 15 minutes to 1 hour, depending on the amount of hair. Shining a bright light on the scalp, and using a magnifying glass, enables you to better spot the lice.

**Nits** – It is common to find the nits before finding the lice. Washing the hair before a thorough check is helpful to reduce dandruff and other debris that can be mistaken for nits. Check above and behind the ears, at the top of the neck and at the forehead first. Then check the rest of the head. You are looking for beige to light brown eggs the size of poppy seeds or smaller glued to the hair shaft. You will not be able to brush them away. They will have to be pulled down the entire hair shaft to remove. A sample is on the PAC bulletin board in the main hallway.

**Keep looking.** One louse lays 10 to 20 eggs a day for 30 days. Each egg takes 7 to 10 days to hatch. It takes about 3 weeks for the density of the lice to result in the itching and scratching symptoms. By 4 or more weeks nits become easier to identify due to the number present. The earlier it is caught the easier it is to treat.

## **I found lice now what?**

Note that all options work better in combination with thorough manual lice combing and nit removal. Manual nit removal and lice combing should occur every 1-2 days the first week to 10 days of treatment and every 2-3 days for 2 weeks following.

-Your pharmacy has products that will kill the adult lice and some that also kill the majority of the eggs. Most of these contain pesticides or other toxic chemicals and need to be used as directed.

-Home remedies, such as olive oil and tea tree oil, must be used in conjunction with thorough lice combing and manual nit removal. There is limited clinical research on the effectiveness but many anecdotal reports. Note that these remedies also contain toxins – that is how they kill the insects – so must also be used carefully.

-Others rely strictly on lice combing and nit removal for success. This will take 10 days concentrated effort and 2 more weeks follow-

## **More Information**

A selection of websites are provided below for your own research and selection.

[http://www.toronto.ca/health/hl\\_index.htm#how](http://www.toronto.ca/health/hl_index.htm#how)

<http://www.bchealthguide.org/healthfiles/hfile06.stm>

<http://www.headlice.org/>

<http://kidshealth.org/parent/infections/common/lice.html>

<http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/headlice.html>

[www.headliceinfo.com](http://www.headliceinfo.com)

[www.environmentalhealth.ca/lice](http://www.environmentalhealth.ca/lice)

<http://www.vch.ca/sneezesdiseases/docs/SneezesDiseases.pdf>