

Pest of the Month Head Lice



Fig. 1. Adult head louse. About 1/8” in length; range in color from white to brown to dark gray.



Fig. 2. Nit with cap gone and dead un-emerged larva.



Fig. 3. Viable nit glued to hair.

Inside This Issue

- 1 Head Lice Prevention
- 1 Lice Are Insects & Nits
- 2 BMPs and More Biology
- 2 Mystery of the Month

Coming back to school is one of those events that can cause excitement and anxiety at the same time. September is also **National Head Lice Prevention Month**.

New school year, new activities, new classes, new friends. Friends share. They share more than they should sometimes--hats, caps, combs, hair ties--and while we like to encourage sharing, this is one of the ways the human “ectoparasite” the head louse is thought to be transmitted. Actually, the way head lice are probably most commonly transmitted is “head-to-head” contact.

Brevard School District does not have a “no nit” policy--what are nits and why doesn’t BSD have a “no nit” policy? Read on. The first thing you need to know is that it is **USELESS to spray for head lice** in your classrooms or at home--so please don’t ask your pest control technician to do so. Head lice typically die within 24 to 48 hours after being dislodged from its host--they need to be on the scalp in order to survive.

Here are some tips on how to **PREVENT** head lice outbreaks:

- Children should be encouraged NOT to share combs, hats, and other personal belongings.
- Periodic inspections (monitoring) will aid in early detection of any individual lice which are more easily controlled than advanced infestations where dozens of mature lice and possibly hundreds of lice eggs are present. Be aware of medical and privacy issues. Consult your school nurse.
- NOTE: The issue of personal hygiene is important, but lice are easily transmitted and children should not be stigmatized because of a one-time occurrence.

You’ll also need to know a couple of other key life-cycle points about head lice in order to understand why insecticides alone won’t cure this problem.

BIOLOGY: LICE ARE INSECTS

- Lice have three pairs of legs which make them true insects.
- Lice do not have wings or powerful jumping legs so they move about by clinging to hairs with claw-like legs.
- Head lice prefer to live on the hair of the head although they have been known to wander to other parts of the body.

LICE EGGS ARE CALLED “NITS”

- Nits are oval white cylinders (1/16 inch long), commonly found near the ears and back of the head (Fig. 2, 3).
- Nits are glued to hairs of the head, usually near the scalp and are very hard to remove. A fine-toothed metal comb for nit removal is a must and is usually available at any pharmacy.

HEADLICE FACTOIDS:

The head louse/lice:

- *Pediculus capitis* DeGeer infests 10-12 million people each year in the United States. Pediculosis (lice infestation) is one of the most prevalent communicable conditions in this country.
- Are transferred from person to person by direct contact or by several people using the same combs, brushes, hats, or bedding (fomite transmission).
- Are not found on animals or household pets and are not transmitted from pets to humans.
- Infestations are normally found on children, but can also be spread to adults.

Mystery of the month . . .

The mystery of the month for September:
To touch or not to touch, that is the question!



Answer: Don't touch! It's a puss caterpillar which can leave blisters on the skin.

Integrated Pest Management .



For more information about IPM in schools, or to view past issues of the Pest Press, please visit <http://schoolipm.ifas.ufl.edu>

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Con't. from page 1 . . . Lice eggs are called "nits".

- Under normal conditions the eggs will hatch in 7-10 days, long enough for hair to grow away from the scalp. *The importance of this factoid: if the nits are more than 1/4" from the scalp, they are probably no longer viable or hatched out already.*
- Female lice lay 6-7 eggs (nits) per day and may lay a total of 50-100 eggs during their life, which may last up to 40 days.
- Head lice do not normally live within rugs, carpet, or school buses.
- *Brevard does not have a "no-nit" policy because a Harvard School of Public Health study demonstrated that nits are misidentified about 40% of the time, causing unnecessary absences from school.*

ONCE NITS HATCH--

- The young lice which emerge from nits must feed within 24 hours or they will die.
- Newly hatched lice will periodically take blood meals and molt three times before becoming adults.
- Normally a young louse will mature in 10-12 days to an adult.

THE ADULTS:

- Adults (Fig. 1) can only survive 1-2 days without a blood meal. The nymphs and adults all have piercing-sucking mouthparts which pierce the skin for a blood meal.

BEST MANAGEMENT PRACTICES FOR HEAD LICE:

- Inspect child's head
- Shampoo and remove tangles.
- Divide hair into sections.
- Comb lice out using nit comb, rinse comb in soapy water.
 - Use good lighting and a magnifying glass for examinations.
 - An entertaining DVD will help fidgety children sit long enough to thoroughly comb
 - Combing should be done every day for two weeks
- Insecticidal shampoos are available, but be aware that some head lice are resistant to the insecticides in the shampoos. Our recommendation is to comb the lice out.
 - See ENY-296 Head Lice for more details on head lice management. (<http://schoolipm.ifas.ufl.edu/>)
 - Also check out: <http://headlice.org/>

Read All About It

Interested in learning more about the School IPM process? There is a great new book out that outlines what School IPM is all about. "A Worm in the Teacher's Apple: Protecting America's School Children from Pests and Pesticides" by Dr. Marc Lame is a must read for anyone interested in why School IPM should be a priority for the safety of the children

