



# Oklahoma School IPM

## Head Lice



Head lice are insects. They do not spread disease. Head lice do prevent children from attending school and create negative social interactions for people who have them.

**Description:** Head lice are very small (1/8 inch long). When they hatch from eggs, they are wingless and feed on human blood. They have claws that cling to hair shafts. Head lice move by crawling and do not jump.



Head Louse Adult - adults and called nymphs differ in size and color.



Head lice eggs are nits and "glued" to hair.

**Location:** Head lice are found on people's heads. They do not live in pet hair. People "catch" head lice from other people who are infested. These insects do not have a dormant period. They live on a host and travel from person to person throughout the year.

**Life Cycle:** Eggs are called nits, about 1/16 inch cylinders, and vary in color from white, gray, tan, to dark brown. Nits hatch within 7 to 10 days. Nymphs are clear in color after hatching and become darker when they begin to feed. They become adults in two weeks. Adults lay eggs.

**Monitoring:** Frequent inspections are essential in reducing the spread of head lice. Check students after long vacations, i.e., summer and

fall break, Christmas vacation, and spring break. Search the scalp, especially the back of the head and neck, and part hair into sections for easiest viewing. Remove lice with tweezers or a lice comb. Be careful not to spread lice while inspecting. Reduce infestations by not allowing children to share combs, hats, or other similar belongings. Check children up to 10 days following a treatment.

**Building Maintenance:** When a classroom has an outbreak, wash all items in hot, soapy water. Wipe vinyl mats. Vacuum carpets. Sweep and mop tile floors. Lice cannot live without food for more than 48 hours.

**Cultural Practices:** Head lice combs are very effect on removing nits. Wash hair often and use a blow-dryer if possible. Continual hair grooming creates a less preferred habitat.

**Pesticides:** Pesticides are not necessary for the classroom. Do not spray mats, floors, shelves, toys, activity games, or anything else children touch. Shampoos contain an insecticide. **Read and follow label directions** for optimal effectiveness and prevention of lice insecticide resistance. Do not recommend alternative treatments including mayonnaise since these are not supported by scientific research.

