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**HORIZON SCHOOL DIVISION****Policy Code:** IHCG  
**Policy Title:** Head Lice**POLICY HANDBOOK****Cross Reference:**  
**Legal Reference:**  
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**POLICY**

THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES OF HORIZON SCHOOL DIVISION RECOGNIZES THAT HEAD LICE IN SCHOOLS ARE A NUISANCE AND NOT A HEALTH HAZARD AS THEY DO NOT TRANSMIT DISEASE. THE BOARD, THEREFORE, BELIEVES THAT OUTBREAKS OF HEAD LICE IN SCHOOLS SHOULD BE MINIMIZED THROUGH EDUCATION AND SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS AND FAMILIES.

**DEFINITIONS**

Lice – tiny wingless insects with 6 legs,

- 2-4 mm long and greyish brown in color (about the size of a sesame seed),
- live on the human head (commonly found around ears, forehead and nape of neck)
- cannot fly or jump but move quickly and are difficult to see

Nits – Eggs of lice,

- attached to the hair shaft close to the scalp.
- they can sometimes be mistaken for dandruff

**GUIDELINES**

1. School principals, shall ensure that staff and parents are provided with best practice information on lice, including the importance of regular detection combing and how to do it, early in the school year, not just when there is thought to be an “outbreak.” (Attachment A – Head Lice Information, Attachment B – Head Lice Responsibility, Attachment C – Head Lice Detection Combing).
2. Staff and parents are encouraged to be vigilant regarding possible head lice outbreaks and to communicate suspected cases to the school principal.
3. Parents/guardians of all students in a classroom where an outbreak of head lice has occurred shall NOT be notified of the outbreak in the classroom.
  - 3.1. Most schools will always have some pupils with head lice at any one time. An “alert letter” could be sent out every day of the school year and.
    - 3.1.1. causes unnecessary public alarm
    - 3.1.2. may convince parents, they and their children have head lice when they in fact do not (psychogenic itch), or decide to use chemical lotions as inappropriate prophylaxis “just in case”
  - 3.2. When an active head-lice infestation is discovered, the person has probably been infested for at least 1 month.
    - 3.2.1. Children can have head lice for several weeks with no symptoms.
    - 3.2.2. There is no immediate risk on the day of detection.

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- 3.3. Mis-identification is very common,
- 3.4. Exclusionary practices or quarantine
  - 3.4.1. would often result in inappropriate exclusions from school. The resulting time lost by children from school and missed work by parents is substantial.
  - 3.4.2. do not effectively control head lice transmission.
4. Schools will not take on the responsibility of checking heads for head lice. Rather parents are encouraged to utilize detection combing methods as an ongoing monitoring method (Attachment C – Detection Combing)
5. If it is determined that a head lice problem exists, the school principal shall ensure that information regarding head lice including a treatment protocol is shared with the child’s parent.
6. It is not required that a student be removed from classes because of a head lice problem.
7. School principals may encourage parents to contact local public health personnel for information and assistance.

# Head Lice

## What Are Head Lice?

Head lice, or the medical condition known as pediculosis, are a pesky problem that anyone can have at some point in their life. Most often infestations occur in children 3 to 11 years of age.

Head lice are not dangerous and they do not spread disease but they can and do spread from person to person. Having dirty hair does not cause head lice.

Head lice cannot fly or jump and you cannot get them from your pets.

While they may be **found anywhere on the head**, they prefer to live on the scalp along the neckline and behind the ears. When lice bite the scalp they cause itching.

## How Do I Know If My Child Has Head Lice?

Children may say they have a tickling feeling on their head or may be very itchy on their scalp.

**It can take up to 4-6 weeks for a person to experience itching.**

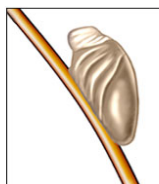
The only way to be sure a person has an active case of lice is to find live lice.

Lice are not easy to see and can be hard to find. They are about the size of a sesame seed. They are usually greyish white or brown.

Nits are small, oval and blend into the color of the hair. Each nit is firmly attached to a hair. They cannot be washed out or flicked off like dandruff. Finding nits does not mean the individual has a current infestation and they should not be treated based on finding nits.



Head louse



Louse egg (nit) on hair

## How Do I Check for Lice?

Detection combing is the recommended method to check for head lice.

Detection combing is an organized examination of the hair, from the scalp outwards, to find head lice. Finding lice by parting the hair and looking at the scalp is not particularly efficient and likely to miss many infestations

Please see Head-Lice-Detection Combing handout

For a demonstration on detection combing:  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=je-cWdTrhFQ](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=je-cWdTrhFQ)

## Can My Child Attend School?

Once children are treated they can return to school because:

- Head lice do not spread disease
- Children can have head lice for several weeks with no symptoms.
- The presence of nits indicates a past infestation that may not be currently active
- Cases of head lice are often misdiagnosed

## How can you prevent the spread of head lice?

- Teach your children how head lice are spread (by direct contact with the head of someone with an infestation) and to avoid this kind of activity.
- It is a good idea to teach your children not to share brushes, combs or head gear such as hats, bandanas etc.
- Check your child's head for live lice once a week all year long and daily during an outbreak.
- Head-to-head contact may be less if long hair is braided or tied back.



# Head Lice: Who's Responsibility Are They?

## Head Lice

Head lice or the medical condition known as pediculosis, are a pesky problem that anyone can have at some point in their life.

Head lice are not dangerous and they do not spread disease but they can and do spread from person to person.

Infection is common during school holidays as well as during the school year. Parents start to worry more about lice when children go back to school because they think the lice are being caught there.

Research indicates that most lice are caught from close family and friends in the home and community, not just from the school.

Head louse infection is a problem of the whole community, not just the schools. Co-ordinated efforts between parents, teachers, schools, public health and the community are necessary to control outbreaks of head lice.

## Role and Responsibilities

### Parents' Role:

- Be aware of the signs and the symptoms of infestation;
- Be familiar with the technique for examining hair for lice and nits;
- Examine their children's heads weekly for signs of infestation as part of routine hygiene;
- Notify the school when their child has lice and others who have come into contact with the child, that is, family members, neighbours, etc.;
- Carry out treatment on family members with live moving lice;
- Wash personal items such as combs, brushes, bedding and hats;
- Inform the school that treatment has been completed

### School's Role:

- Schools should not take on the responsibility of checking heads for head lice as traditional methods of parting the hair and looking at the scalp is not efficient and many infestations may be missed.
- "Alert" letters should not be sent out. These can cause an "outbreak" of imaginary lice.
- Research indicates children who may have lice should not be excluded from school; if they do have lice, they will probably have been there for weeks already.
- The school should give best practice information on lice to parents and staff, including the importance of regular detection combing and how to do it. Provision of information should be on a regular basis throughout the year, not just when there is thought to be an "outbreak."

### Public Health Role

- Providing Best Practice treatment guidelines to schools, to parents and community agencies upon request;
- Assisting school boards and schools to implement head lice policies and protocols;
- Consultation on difficult-to-treat cases of head lice

**For more information contact:**

**Your local Public Health Office  
or your Physician  
or  
Health Link Alberta 1-866-408-5465**



# Head Lice – Detection Combing

## What is Detection Combing?

Detection Combing is an organized examination of the hair, from the scalp outwards, to find head lice. Finding lice by parting the hair and looking at the scalp is not particularly efficient and likely to miss many infestations.

## How Do I Do Detection Combing?

### You need:

1. *Plastic* fine-toothed comb. Available in most Drug Stores. Many combs sold as louse detection and removal combs are unsuitable for the purpose. Combs with flat-faced, parallel-sided teeth less than 0.3mm apart are appropriate. Metal combs are harsh and may pull hair out.
2. Good lighting
3. Ordinary comb

### Steps

- Wash the hair well and then dry it with a towel. The hair should be damp. Detection combing dry hair can lead to static in the hair and lice can be repelled from the comb into the air as the comb is withdrawn from the hair.
- Make sure there is good light. Daylight is best.
- Comb the hair with an ordinary comb.
- Start with the teeth of the fine-toothed comb touching the skin of the scalp at the top of the head. Keep the comb in contact with the scalp as long as possible, draw the comb carefully towards the edge of the hair.
- Look carefully at the teeth of the comb in good light.
- Wipe the fine-toothed comb off on white tissue (like Kleenex or paper towel) to see any lice that may be caught in the comb
- Repeat the combing over and over again from the top of the head to the edge of the hair in all directions, working round the head.
- Do this for several minutes. It takes 10 to 15 minutes to do it properly for each head.
- If there are head lice, you will find one or more lice on the teeth of the comb.