Evidence-based Research Counteracts Common Myths Regarding Head Lice Policy in Schools.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that 6 million to 12 million U.S. children between the ages of 3 and 11 are infested each year by lice, which do not carry disease. The bugs crawl among children during sustained contact at sleepovers, play groups and other such activities. The wingless insects live their entire lives on human scalps, feeding on blood and attaching their eggs to hair follicles.

CDC officials support more lenient policies of the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), whose 2010 report said, "No healthy child should be excluded from or allowed to miss school time because of head lice," adding that "no-nit" policies keeping students out of school "should be abandoned".

The AAP, National Association of School Nurses, CDC, and The Harvard School of Public Health strongly discourage no-nit policies, as there is no evidence that suggests these policies are effective in decreasing the prevalence of lice infestations. Despite the lack of empirical evidence, 60% of schools maintain no-nit policies. Rollins, from Pediatric Nursing states “screening for live lice or nits has not proven to have a significant effect on the incidence of head lice in a school community over time.” Head lice, or *pediculosis*, are primarily spread through person to person contact with students’ heads needing to be in contact for over 1 minute. Williams and colleagues study concluded that “transmission of head lice within the classroom is relatively rare, that spread of the infection is likely from home or a ‘best friend’”. Studies have shown that pediculosis is often misdiagnosed and “even trained professionals can be inept at detecting an active lice infestation.” Another study by Frankowski in 2010 concluded that even with a live bug detected children should not be excluded from school, “a child with an active infestation has likely had lice for over a month or more by the time it is discovered and poses little increased risk to the other students by remaining in the class”. The Northwest Policy Group in their policy paper regarding pediculosis conclude that alert letters should not be sent out as they increase anxiety and stigma related to head lice.

In conclusion, the guidance recommended by these leading organizations is contrary to what is actually taking place in our schools. There is an abundant amount of evidence to support their conclusions. No-nit policies, exclusions and screenings for head lice have not shown to decrease the prevalence of pediculosis.


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http://www.hpa.org.uk/webc/hpawebfile/hpawe_c/1296681612732

http://www.latimes.com/nation/la-na-nevada-head-lice-20131216,0,5955635.story#ixzz2nfA60Dp6