

prevalence data. All of this points to a bit of hysteria when it comes to head lice infestation and "outbreaks" at school.

The most controversial aspects surrounding head lice in schools are the "no nit" policies that exclude children from class on the presence of nits alone. The American Academy of Pediatrics, the National Association of School Nurses, and the Center for Disease Control and Prevention all state that "no-nit" policies in schools are not effective in controlling head lice transmission and can disrupt the educational process. Furthermore, screening for nits is not an accurate or cost-effective way to prevent infestation. While "no nit" policies may be reassuring to parents, teachers and staff, they perpetuate the misunderstandings about head lice and feed into the hysteria of "outbreaks" at a school. Absolute exclusion from schools is reserved for more contagious and serious diseases, such as chickenpox, pertussis, and measles. In diseases where effective treatment is available (e.g., strep throat, conjunctivitis, or scabies), children are readmitted shortly after treatment is initiated. Some communicable diseases with low transmissibility and/or low morbidity (e.g., molluscum contagiosum or common warts) do not lead to routine exclusion from school. Therefore, if nits alone do not generally result in infestation and head lice is considered a relatively low-risk health condition, then there is no sense in continuing to exclude children on the basis they *might* develop an infestation due to the presence of nits.

New LAUSD Head Lice Policies: LAUSD head lice policies are changing to represent a shift in the way we approach the condition. District policies and guidelines have been modified in the following form to ensure that the best evidence is used to evaluate and manage students suspected of head lice.

- The *Communicable Diseases in Schools (Reference Guide)*, 3rd Edition, 2005 includes the following recommendations for exclusion and readmission of students with head lice:
 - Exclusion is warranted "when a student has the signs and symptoms of infestation (the most specific being the presence of a live louse). The condition does *not* warrant immediate exclusion. Inform parents of suspected infestation and avoid any activity that involves the child in head-to-head contact with other children or sharing of any head gear until the end of the school day."
 - Readmission occurs "after the child has received the proper treatment they may return to school. While the removal of nits is desirable to avoid diagnostic confusion, the presence of nits alone (after treatment) is *not* sufficient criteria to exclude children from school."
- Memorandum (MEM-1877) *Student Health Information for Parents/Guardians - Elementary* contains the following statement: "An effort will be made to notify parents/guardians about school exposure to head lice. Children with head lice will be excluded from school until the condition is corrected. After treatment, removal of nits is desirable before returning to school." Note: the removal of nits, while desirable, is not mandatory for the readmission to school.