

# WEST MILFORD PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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## Myths and Facts about Head Lice

Myth	Fact
Head lice carry disease.	<i>Head lice do not carry disease.<sup>i</sup></i>
Head lice can jump and fly.	<i>Lice crawl. They are anatomically incapable of hopping, jumping, and flying.<sup>ii</sup></i>
Head lice are easy to get.	<i>Since head lice are spread by head-to-head contact, they are much harder to get than a cold, flu, ear infection, pink eye, strep throat, or impetigo.<sup>iii</sup></i>
Head lice are a sign of poor hygiene.	<i>Hygiene makes absolutely no difference. Lice is spread by close personal head-to-head contact with someone else that has lice, not by being dirty.<sup>iv</sup></i>
Eggs or nits can fall out of the hair, hatch, and cause lice in another person.	<i>Nits are cemented to the hair and are very hard to remove. They cannot fall off. Newly hatched lice must find a head quickly or will die.<sup>v</sup></i>
School is a common place for the transmission of head lice.	<i>School is rarely a source of transmission. Since head-to-head contact is more likely among close personal contacts (family members, overnight guests, and playmates), research shows that private homes are more likely the place for head lice transmission.<sup>vi</sup></i>
Head lice can be passed from one person to another by sharing hats or helmets, hair brushes, clothing, or other personal items.	<i>Research has shown that head lice are rarely passed by contact with personal items. Head-to-head contact is the usual mode of transmission.<sup>vii</sup></i>
Checking a classroom when one student has lice can prevent lice from spreading.	<i>Classroom transmission is EXCEEDINGLY RARE and checking students is a waste of valuable teaching time. Checking family members and close contacts is much more appropriate.<sup>viii</sup></i>
Nits left in the hair can cause lice to come back.	<i>Once a nit is more than ¼" away from the scalp, it is no longer viable. Nits that are farther away from the scalp are already hatched and will pose no risk to others.<sup>ix</sup></i>
Head lice can be spread by pets.	<i>Lice are species-specific. The head louse can only be spread from human to human.<sup>x</sup></i>
All members of the family should be treated if one person has lice.	<i>Only the person with lice should be treated. Lice shampoos are insecticides and can be dangerous if used incorrectly or too frequently. Household members in close contact should be checked, but only treat those that have lice. The house should not be sprayed with insecticide, nor used on clothing or other items.<sup>xi</sup></i>
Letters to Parents when a case of lice is identified at school are a good way to control the spread of head lice.	<i>There is no evidence to support the claim that letters sent home prevent head lice transmission, and they may, in fact, be a violation of privacy and confidentiality.<sup>xii</sup></i>

## Resources

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- <sup>i</sup> (Centers for Disease Control and Preventions [CDC], 2013a)
- <sup>ii</sup> (CDC, 2013a)
- <sup>iii</sup> (Pontius, 2014)
- <sup>iv</sup> (CDC, 2013a)
- <sup>v</sup> (CDC, 2013a)
- <sup>vi</sup> (Aston, 2002) (NASN Head Lice 101: What You Should Know About Head Lice, 2013)
- <sup>vii</sup> (Frankowski & Bocchini, 2010)
- <sup>viii</sup> (CDC, 2013a, Frankowski& Bocchini, 2010, NASN, 2011)
- <sup>ix</sup> (CDC, 2013a)
- <sup>x</sup> (CDC, 2013a)
- <sup>xi</sup> (CDC, 2013a)
- <sup>xii</sup> (American School Health Association, 2000, Frankowski & Bocchini, 2010)