Pediculosis (Head lice):

Pediculosis is a human condition that has impacted our society for hundreds of years. However, today's medical remedies are effective and if used properly can eliminate head lice. If we follow the guidelines provided in the article "Prevention and Control of Head Lice" (available at our schools) parents, teachers and child care providers will be able to manage this health care nuisance in a calm, cooperative and effective manner.

The diligent and determined efforts of twenty parents can be completely wasted if one child care provider (parent, teacher, uncle, aunt, day care provider, Brownie Scout Leader, etc.) does not actively participate in the treatment/cleaning/communication process.

Only individuals who have live lice or nits should be treated with pediculicides. However, all children and adults connected to the infested individual should be a part of and contribute to the daily cleaning process.

A. General guidelines of which everyone should be aware:

1. Head lice is not life threatening. Let's not scare our children. And let's not overuse the treatments available.

2. Head lice can be effectively treated with over the counter remedies. Purchase the type with which you feel most comfortable and follow the directions carefully. Consult your family physician when in doubt.

3. Prevention of head lice infestation is simple -one need only avoid direct or indirect contact with other people's hair. Try to gently remind children of this fact and help them make wise decisions.

4. Parents and child care providers of children who have pediculosis should communicate with the parents of the children with whom their child has/will come in close contact. This notification will give other parents the opportunity to identify and begin treatment for head lice, if present, before the lice can become established. Also, if the school has not been made directly aware of the case, please contact the school nurse to inform her of the situation.

5. Each School Office and Nurse Station has additional information that can be obtained upon request. If you have any questions please ask. A copy of the article "Prevention and Control of Head Lice" is also available.

B. Brief Explanation of School Efforts:

Board of Education Regulation 5141.1(c) and 5142.2 Students Accidents/Illness states that students found to have pediculosis will be "excluded until treated with pediculicide. Return after treatment with parent and proof of treatment. Retreatment required seven to ten days after first treatment."

Our district's staff members have tried and will continue to try to make this regulation as easy for parents to adhere to as possible. It is recognized that parents and other child care providers must assume the responsibility of following the prescribed treatment plans. All adults involved must try to remember that their cooperation in this action is essential.

Having pediculosis should not be an embarrassment to anyone. It is simply a condition, much like the common cold or flu, that is preventable only to a degree but once contracted must be dealt with effectively and quickly. However, choosing not to do anything about a known case of pediculosis, not sharing knowledge of the infestation with others having had close contact with the infested individual, nor treating the infested individual and home environment as recommended is a detriment to all in the community.

Our district notifies all classroom parents of the presence of head lice when more than two cases of pediculosis have been identified within a classroom by our school staff or reported to us by parents within a 10 calendar day period. We request the parents of all children identified with pediculosis to immediately contact those individuals who may have been in close contact with their son or daughter (i.e. day care providers, close playmates, etc.). Notifying all parents having students in the classroom/school environment prior to the above criteria has been reached has been judged to be unwarranted by medical and state advisors. Yet, if cases are not reported to the school nurse in a timely fashion, one can see how the effectiveness of the above stated procedure is further weakened. Again, full cooperation by all is extremely important.

Another concern relates to the "nit" or egg left by the louse. It is strongly recommended that the hair be completely clear of all nits as quickly as possible. If treated by a pediculicide at the right moment during their development, nits are thought to be rendered lifeless. Yet it is proven by experience that a 100% kill rate of all nits by any of the various treatments does not always occur even though the name brand treatment directions will make such a statement. This conflict of information exists because the conditions (quantity of lice and nits) and treatment application thoroughness (quantity of hair, time of treatment application during the incubation cycle, complete execution of the treatment) vary from case to case. It is unreasonable to exclude children from school who have been appropriately treated with a pediculicide. Likewise, parents should not rely on the promise made by the manufacturers of the pediculicides that all treated nits are dead. Parents should try to remove all nits as quickly and as safely as possible.

Treating pediculosis is very time consuming and does require daily meticulous aftercare of removing nits, vacuuming environments and washing extra laundry. Treating pediculosis can also be emotionally draining on all involved individuals (including our children) as it represents much added stress to our already very busy and hectic lives. Yet, pediculosis is a human condition that will not go away on its own. Pediculosis needs to be dealt with effectively, cooperatively and calmly.

Frequently, all parents and child care providers remind children to take reasonable precautions to avoid activities that spread germs. We find ourselves making daily comments such as "wash your hands before you eat", "keep your hands away from your mouth", and "cover your mouth before you cough". To this list of comments we should now add comments relating to the spread of pediculosis.

Pediculosis is not a school problem, nor a child problem, nor a particular day care facility problem. Pediculosis is a human condition that impacts everyone in our community. All of us need to take appropriate precautions, treat it if we become infested, communicate with others concerning our circumstances and calmly respond to the changing conditions daily.

Pediculosis is a treatable condition and represents an opportunity for us to model for our children responsible, cooperative, effective behavior.