**Head Lice**

Date: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Dear Parent/Guardian,

Today we discovered that a child at child care has **head lice** and/or nits (louse eggs). While head lice do not spread any disease, they pass easily from child to child, are uncomfortable, and are best dealt with right away. Your child must be free of lice before returning to child care.

**What are head lice?**

* Head lice are tiny insects that live on the scalp and crawl through the hair. They are gray, brown, or black and can be difficult to see.
* Head lice live only on the heads of their human hosts. Lice need human blood to survive and most will die within 24 to 48 hours if they cannot find a "meal". They do not infest pets, furniture, carpeting or toys, although they may live on these things for a day or so after leaving the scalp of a person with lice.
* Lice lay eggs (nits) on the hair close to the scalp. (Nits have to be on the hair near the scalp in order to hatch.) It takes about a week for the nits to hatch and just 10 days after hatching lice are capable of laying more eggs.
* Nits are oval shaped and most often can be seen in the hair behind the ears or near the neck. They cling to the hair and do not shake off like dandruff or other skin flakes.
* Head lice occur in all socio-economic groups and are not a sign of poor hygiene, they can infect anyone.

**What are the symptoms of head lice?**

Itching of the scalp, behind ears and neck is the most common symptom of lice. Nits may or may not cause itching. Hair must be closely examined to see if nits are present. There may be open sores and crusting on scalp and behind ears. Swollen glands may be present.

**How are head lice spread?**

* Most often by head-to-head contact with someone who has lice.
* By using a hat, clothing, comb, brush or bedding of someone who has lice.
* More rarely, by placing the clothing worn by someone who has lice close to the clothing of others (as in a coat closet).

**How do I treat lice and nits?**

Talk to your health care provider about treatment options for head lice. These include nontoxic treatments and insecticide shampoos. Some of these chemicals are toxic and should be used carefully and only as directed.

Removal of lice and nits by combing them out with a special fine toothed comb is very difficult and time consuming and is not necessary.

**What else do I need to do?**

* Check other household members and close contacts for lice for 21 days, and consider ongoing weekly checks through the year. Treat other family members who have lice.
* Do not treat someone if you do not see live lice or nits in their hair.
* Wash all combs or brushes used by the person in extra-hot (130º F) soapy water.
* Wash all clothing, (including coats, hats, scarves), and bedding used by the person with lice in the two days prior to treatment in extra-hot water (130° F) or put in a dryer on high heat for at least 30 minutes. Dry clean items that are not machine washable.
* Pack non-washable items in a sealed plastic bag for two weeks to kill any lice that may have been dislodged onto those items.
* Vacuum upholstered furniture, carpets, bicycle helmets, sports helmets, and upholstered car seats used by the person(s) with lice in the two days prior to treatment. Don’t overdo it – lice are usually spread head-to-head, and are rarely transmitted through other objects.
* **Do not use lice or insecticide sprays!** They are not effective and may cause toxic or allergic reactions.

**Notify your child care provider if you find lice or nits on your child’s hair. Your child may return to child care after treatment and when there are no live lice found.**

This letter was created using the resource, *The AAP (American Academy of Pediatrics). 2008. Managing Infectious Diseases in Child Care and Schools. 2nd Edition*