

Dear Parents/Guardians,

As we return back to school, we know that the incidence of sharing germs, bacteria, viruses and other communicable health conditions, such as Head Lice, becomes a possibility. We are also very busy and social and, as a result, we are susceptible to receiving and transmitting communicable diseases and other health conditions. Just to be clear, *Head Lice*, as mentioned above, is not a disease but still is a communicable health condition because it can be spread from one person to the next. This letter is to inform you what measures you can do and promote good health habits with your children and families to stay healthy as possible.

- **Encourage and promote good hand hygiene always** and lead by practicing it yourself. When the H1N1 crisis was upon our communities, most people stepped up **good hand hygiene and covering coughs and sneezes with a tissue or your arm**, but once it was not widely publicized, people went back to their old habits. Also, **thoroughly dry hands after washing them. Use hand sanitizer when you are not able to wash hands.**
- **Good hand hygiene can help stave off many communicable diseases and health conditions including ringworms, pinworms and scabies.** While it is common knowledge, it cannot be emphasized enough that hand hygiene should be promoted after handling animals and **especially** after going to the bathroom, and before eating. A good, thorough hand washing should take approximately 40-60 seconds. Begin by wetting the hands with warm water. Lather up the hands with soap and wash not only the palms of the hands but also the back side of the hand, lace your fingers together to wash in between the fingers, wash the wrists, and remember to include washing around the nail beds. Finally, make a small pile of suds in the palm of your hand and scrub the finger nails of the opposite hand into the suds to clean under them as well.
- In the home environment, please remember to clean and disinfect high traffic areas such as bathrooms, kitchens, etc. Please also remember to thoroughly clean and disinfect light switch and covers, door knobs, hand rails, telephone receivers and key pads, faucet handles, drawer pulls and other items/areas that we touch frequently but do not always think of cleaning on a regular basis. If you are dealing with a communicable condition with your family and in your home, please clean these items on a daily basis. Remember to change out towels daily in the kitchen and bathroom to reduce harboring germs and bacteria.

- **Keep your children home if they are ill with a fever (please do not send back to school until they are fever free, without the use of any over the counter medicine, for 24 hours), nausea and/or vomiting, or general complaints of flu-like symptoms. Please call the school and report illnesses, or communicable conditions such as head lice, to the school office.**
- Avoid head-to-head (hair-to-hair) contact during play and other activities at home, school, and elsewhere (sports, playgrounds, slumber parties, camps, etc.)
- Do not share clothing and other personal items such as hats, scarves, coats, sports uniforms, hooded sweatshirts, combs, brushes, hair ribbons, headbands, hair ties, barrettes or even towels (personal ones at home or ones used for swimming). Remember not to share baseball/softball hats, batting helmets, football helmets, biking helmets or other hats such as the “Logan Nose On” hats, party hats, etc.
- Any personal item that cannot be put in the clothes washer and washed in hot water (such as combs, brushes, hair accessories, certain hats), disinfect by soaking them in hot water (at least 130 degrees F) for 5-10 minutes. Let air dry before using.
- Check your children’s hair periodically for nits. This can be a simple task while they are watching TV. Nits look like a tear drop shaped egg that clings to the hair shaft. You cannot move it away with your finger as you can dandruff or dried hair products. You have to pull it off the hair shaft using either your fingers or a very fine-toothed comb like the one in a lice treatment kit. Nits can be pearly, gray or brownish in color. Lice do not like pet dander so you cannot transmit it or receive it from pets. Also, lice do not jump, hop or fly; they crawl off of one person, or the person’s belongings, and on to another.
- Do not lie on beds, couches, pillows, carpets, or stuffed animals that have been recently been in contact with an infested person.
- Machine wash and dry clothes, bed linens, towels, and other items that an infested person wore or used during the 2 days before diagnosis and treatment using the hot water (130 degrees F) laundry cycle and the highest heat drying cycle that will not ruin the clothing/linens. Clothing and items that are not washable can be dry-cleaned or sealed in a plastic bag, twisted tied shut, and stored out in the garage or another place for 3 weeks undisturbed. Continue to wash their laundry this way, separate from others, for 3 weeks.

- Vacuum the floor, furniture and mattresses, particularly where the infested person sat or lay. If there is an infestation in the home, vacuum daily during the 3 weeks of treatment and discard the vacuum bag after each use. If you have a bag-less vacuum, clean and disinfect the collection chamber as mentioned above for the use of personal items. Remember to vacuum car interiors if you have cloth seats.
- Cover the pillow and mattress of the infested person with pillow and mattress protectors so the louse cannot travel back and forth during the night to feed and lay more eggs.
- Just like using an antibiotic is not effective for a cold or virus, do not use lice treatment shampoo on other members of the household **unless** lice/nits are found on the other person. It is a treatment, not a preventative.
- **Do not use fumigant sprays or fogs; they are not necessary to control head lice and can be toxic if inhaled or absorbed through the skin.**

Finally, many of these suggestions that are applicable have been instituted in our school environment. I can assure you that Mr. Liponoga, the faculty and the staff at Most Precious Blood Catholic School are very thorough and serious about all safety matters for our school environment. The Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend schools maintains a “no nit-no live lice” policy. This means that if lice or nits are found on a child, the child is sent home to begin treatment. We will also check siblings and the classroom of that child. The child may return to school if “nit free and lice free” the next day, meaning that the parents should be checking their child thoroughly before returning to school, and for those 3 weeks of treatment in the home environment. The treatment of the lice shampoo should be done according to package directions. **We also check all students thoroughly before returning to the classroom.** If necessary, we do, and have had to, send children back home if nits or lice are found when they return to school. If you have any questions or concerns, you may feel free to call me at 574-904-0233.

Sincerely,
Maureen VerVaet RN

The School Wellness Ministry of the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend is sponsored through the Saint Joseph Regional Medical Center.